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Mildred Howie.
A Public Relations Pioneer
in the
Sonoma County Wine Industry

Interviewed by
Carole Hicke



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**MILDRED HOWIE:
A PUBLIC RELATIONS PIONEER IN THE
SONOMA COUNTY WINE INDUSTRY**

An Oral History

Interviews by Carole Hicke, 2003



MILDRED HOWIE

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Mildred Howie – Millie to nearly everyone – has the institutionalized history of the winegrowing industry of Sonoma County at her fingertips. She has been writing about Sonoma and California wines and grapes since the mid-‘70s, and has been active in promoting and publicizing local wineries.

Born and raised in San Francisco, she took an early interest in journalism and started her career in radio, then television broadcasting. As a woman, she pioneered in the field as a writer/producer.

She was also one of the first persons to work as a public relations consultant in the Northern California wine industry. Howie instituted many innovative events and ideas for her clients, starting with the Geyser Peak Winery. Other public relations accounts followed, and she has written articles for various publications. She has two books to her credit.

But she has done more than just write – much more. Among her many creative ideas was the startup of the Russian River Wine Road, a map pinpointing the wineries of the Alexander, Dry Creek, and Russian River valleys with information about opening times and lodging opportunities.

One of her major community projects was the founding of the Sonoma County Wine Library as an adjunct to the Healdsburg Library. Years spent discussing the idea, persuading supporters, collecting books, and fundraising for the wine library resulted in a rich resource for interested winegrowers, writers, and historians. Millie herself has donated many materials, notes gleaned over the years from her interviews and articles, as well as photographs from her collection.

Howie has contributed a great deal to her community, and in return, her contributions have been recognized. In 1968, the San Francisco Advertising Club named her Advertising Woman of the Year. The Knights of the Vine gave her the Golden Vine Award for excellence in writing in 1985. She was named “Friend of Agriculture” at the Sonoma County Harvest Fair in 1992, and “Living Treasure in Literature” by the Luther Burbank Foundation in 1993. Two years later she was recognized for outstanding contributions to wine journalism by the National Academy of Wine Communications.

Millie Howie’s recollections were tape-recorded on November 6 and 7, 2003, in her home in Rohnert Park. We had a preliminary meeting to discuss the project, and by the time of the recording sessions, she had looked over the outline I sent to her and considered the suggested subjects. After the interviews were transcribed, she carefully reviewed the draft transcript and added corrections and clarifications. Special thanks go to Jann Howie Hayes for her help in locating photos to include in the volume.

An oral history is, by definition, an informal discussion, so we have attempted to retain a sense of spontaneous conversation, as well as ensuring that the narrator's thoughts come through clearly. Words in brackets have been inserted editorially for clarity.

This oral history was funded by the Wine Library Associates of Sonoma County. My grateful thanks to Bo Simons of the Wine Library for facilitating the arrangements.

Carole Hicke
December 2003

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Interview History.....	i
Wine Library Oral History Series.....	iii
I. Family and Background.....	1
II. Early Work Experiences	5
Berkeley, Then Imperial Valley	5
Back to San Francisco.....	6
Getting Started in Broadcasting.....	7
Moving into Public Relations	10
First Female Writer/Producer in San Francisco.....	11
Various Publicity Accounts	14
Forming Mildred Howie Public Relations.....	18
Getting Starting with Wine Publicity	21
III. Geyser Peak Winery	24
Getting the Account.....	24
Public Relations in the Wine Industry	24
Public Relations Work at Geyser Peak.....	25
Some Notes on Pinot Noir.....	29
Geyser Peak Wines	29
Dante Bagnani	31
Winery Events	32
IV. Other Public Relations Activities	43
Working on Various Accounts.....	43
Some Early Wineries	49
Writing for Publications	51
<i>Redwood Rancher Magazine</i>	52
Leon Adams.....	54
First “California Wine Experience”	57
Philosophy of Writing	59
V. Sonoma County Wine Library.....	61
Book Donations.....	61
Starting the Russian River Wine Road.....	63
Ideas for the Wine Library	64
Harvest Fair	66
Building the Library	67
Acquiring More Materials and Fundraising	67
Wine Library Associates.....	70
Sonoma County Library Commissioner.....	72
<i>Sunset</i> and Other Magazines	75
Some Thoughts About the Wine Industry	77

VI. Personal Overview.....	81
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Appendices

- Highlights in the History of the Wine Library, 1975-1988
- Twenty Years Along “The Road”, by Millie Howie, 1996
- Barney, the Wine Dog, by Millie Howie, 1993
- Goodbye, Old Friend, by Millie Howie, 1997
- Promotion, Research and Language, by Millie Howie, 1993

Index

I. FAMILY AND BACKGROUND

Interview Number 1, November 6, 2003

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

HICKE: I'd like to start this morning by getting a little background information on you, beginning with when and where you were born.

HOWIE: I was born in San Francisco at the Stanford-Lane Hospital, which is now the Presbyterian Hospital I think. My mother's name was Blanche Roddick Carter, and my dad was John Bernard Carter.

HICKE: Did your parents live in San Francisco at that time?

HOWIE: My mother and grandparents lived in San Francisco. My mother and dad separated when I was about three, and he lived in Sacramento. I was pretty much raised by my grandparents.

HICKE: In San Francisco?

HOWIE: Yes. I was in San Francisco until I left for college when I was 17.

HICKE: Where did you go to school?

HOWIE: For grammar school I went to Emerson, which I think is still there. And for junior high, Roosevelt Junior High, which is still there. And for high school, Washington High, which is obviously still there.

HICKE: Who had significant influence on you during your early years?

HOWIE: My grandmother did, because she was there every day. And my grandfather, he was my greatest influence, because he was my greatest fan. He thought I was pretty bright, and he would teach me to spell very difficult words and then he would show me off to his friends. He thought I was pretty hot stuff, but he died when I was six.

But my grandmother was always there, and my mother was always there, but she worked. She was the only support for the family, because this was during the Depression era, and she was the only one working.

HICKE: What was she doing?

HOWIE: She worked for the city and county of San Francisco. She worked in several different jobs. She worked at the Registrar's Office for a while. She worked for the Assessor's Office, and I think the longest tenure probably was with the Planning Department. But she was a clerk. She wasn't a clerk typist, but up a grade or two from that, but I don't know what her title would have been. She used to take me to work with her in the evenings when she had no one to leave me with. I can remember when she worked in the Assessor's Office, her boss didn't care if I was there, but he knew I was getting bored, so he would give me work to do, which was actually work that the staff was doing. And every evening he would give me a dime. You know, a dime was pretty big in those days. So I've always been exposed to a lot of work situations and different people, partly through my mother's work.

My dad worked on the railroads, and was working for the post office when he retired. He was a conductor on the Sacramento Northern Line. They didn't part enemies or anything. I mean, my dad was always part of my life. He was from the Midwest. He was born in Colfax, Illinois and he lived in Cuba, Missouri, and was coming out for my wedding, and was killed in an automobile accident. So he was about 66, I guess, when he died.

HICKE: What did you particularly like about high school?

HOWIE: I think I always tended to be a loner, and also I always lived out of the district. In San Francisco the school system was that you had to go to the high school closest to your home. And so I was supposed to go to Girls High School, which was all girls. My mother didn't want that. They were just opening George Washington and were taking students from everywhere, so I was enrolled at Washington. I lived on Bush and Divisadero which was in the Fillmore — Western Addition — and the school, of course, is at 33rd and Geary, so I was not then open to school friends and school activities after school.

HICKE: How did you get to school?

HOWIE: Mostly on the streetcar. When I was in junior high I walked, and often I was the first student there, because my grandmother owned a restaurant, and they opened really early, and I would go and have breakfast and then would hike off to school. There were two big cemeteries between home and the school, and I used to walk through the cemeteries.

I look back now at the freedom we had growing up and the things we could do; even though there were a lot of hungry people and desperate people out there, it never occurred to any of us, any of the children, that we were in danger. We were told not to talk to strangers, the usual things, but I only remember a couple of incidents of being approached, and if you just sort of looked at them as if you didn't understand English, you got away with it. So it was an easier life, a lot easier.

HICKE: Any particular subjects that you liked in high school?

HOWIE: I suppose I always liked — I was going to say English, but English was the study of novels, which I thought were terrible; we were supposed to study *Lorna Doone*. In the front of the book was a sort of synopsis of everything that went on in the book. I never read the book, and I tested highest in the class on the test, and I got an A+ on my report card. To this day I've never read the book. I worked on the school paper.

HICKE: You got an early start?

HOWIE: Yes, I had always written. I can remember writing a little alphabet book when I was five years old. My grandmother had taken paper, not butcher paper but paper that things were wrapped in at the store, and cut little sections and then I just did letters. An "A" I guess for apple. The only letter I remember is Y. Y is for yacht. I spelled it yat. [laughter]

I don't suppose I had a favorite subject. I had some very valuable teachers who gave me things that I've always remembered and always sort of worked with or towards as I've grown up.

HICKE: Do you have an example?

HOWIE: Well, I think one of the — this is so minute, but it made a big impression — I was a senior and was going to have to go out and look for a job. I went to my English teacher, whose name was Mr. Barker, and he was very serious, not rigid, but he was no nonsense, and I had asked him if he would write me a little note saying that I had been a good student, and he did. I took it and I said, "Thanks so much," and when I folded it in half, it folded crooked, and he looked at me and he

said, "If I care enough to write it for you, you should care enough to fold it properly." Every now and then I am in a situation where I've done something that was hasty, or not very nice, not very polite or gracious, I can hear him saying that, and I can see me standing there with that piece of paper all folded catty-cornered.

Then the other thing that has stood me in good stead is that I had finished most of my required subjects, so the last year... in those days you had to take civics within six months of graduation, and civics was the only required course I still had to take, but I wanted to graduate with my class. So I refused to take civics and I took all electives. I took things like history of art. One of the courses I took was salesmanship. The teacher who taught it was a math teacher, and he was not tutored in the psychology of selling, but a lot of the elements of salesmanship that I learned in that class I have used heavily throughout my life.

HICKE: A sales course taught by a math teacher!

HOWIE: Several of the teachers I had were not teaching the subjects they loved. They were teaching whatever they were told to teach.

II. EARLY WORK EXPERIENCES

BERKELEY, THEN IMPERIAL VALLEY

HICKE: OK, what did you do after high school?

HOWIE: After high school I went to UC [University of California] Berkeley, and I worked on the *Daily Californian*.

HICKE: Writing?

HOWIE: Writing, covering the beat. I covered some of the women's sports. I was only there six months or eight months or something, because I got married and left school. So I left school in 1940.

HICKE: What was your husband's name?

HOWIE: Dick Ramey. He was from the Imperial Valley, so we moved to the Imperial Valley. His dad was growing flax all during the war. Flax is used in paint, which they were using gallons of in those days, and so it was a deferred position. Then we separated in 1942, probably May of 1942. By then we had a daughter, Linda, Linda Ramey.

HICKE: Then what did you do?

HOWIE: Well, while I was married — because he was a farmer, we got up at five o'clock in the morning and I would whisk through the house, and my mother-in-law would come over and say, "Give me your mop, dear, you've left a little dust kitty under the bed." [laughter] But she was a housewife, and she enjoyed doing those things, and I didn't, so I went to work at Newberry's [J.J.Newberry] Five-and-Ten, selling, and from there to Woolworth's [F.W. Woolworth] Five-and-Ten, and was selling in the toy department.

When I got pregnant I made the mistake of telling my boss I was pregnant. I was only 18, and so this was very exciting. I guess I wanted

to tell everybody, and I told him and he said, "Oh, it would be very dangerous for you to continue working." So I had no job, which was all right, we managed. When you look back I was getting \$20 a week working full time, 48 hours — six days a week.

BACK TO SAN FRANCISCO

HOWIE: After we separated I came back to San Francisco and lived with my grandmother again, and my mother. I think my mother had moved to an apartment by then, I'm not sure.

HICKE: And your daughter?

HOWIE: And my daughter, sure. Again, I was unskilled and I took whatever job I could get. I worked for Walgreens Drug Store selling candy. That was fun. My granddad had been a pioneer in the broadcast industry in that he built his own crystal sets. He would wake me up at three o'clock in the morning and would say, "Honey, come on out, I've got China." And we would go out and listen to China on the crystal set. So I grew up with radio in my bloodstream, I guess, and that was what I was always going to do. In my mind I was always going to work in radio. So I carried that with me. From Walgreens I went to work at Roos Brothers clothing store, and I was a cashier/wrapper and that was fun.

HICKE: Were you getting an increase in pay?

HOWIE: That was really funny. I was working as a cashier/wrapper, which I didn't mind, I thought it was fun. I was pretty good at it. I was fast and could do a nice, neat package. But for some reason I wanted to work in the credit department. I was looking at the paper one day, and there was an ad from Roos Brothers for someone to work in the credit department. So I made an appointment with the manager and went in and said, "I'm here because you're advertising for someone in the credit department and I wondered why your current employees weren't told about this." He said, "Well, frankly I didn't think you'd be interested, because it would take a salary cut." And I said, "But you didn't ask me." And he said, "Well, would you be interested?" And I said, "Yes."

I think I was getting \$200 a month or \$225. It was not a lot of a cut, not a deep cut. So I worked in the credit department, and in those days they had charge phones and those were wonderful. You know, there was a phone hookup and the clerk would push a button, then read you the name

of the customer, and then the address, and then you would check to make sure that that person had an account and that it was a good account, paid up. Then you would hit a button and it would go ping and it would punch the paper. I loved that. I thought it was great fun.

GETTING STARTED IN BROADCASTING

HOWIE: But all the time this radio thing was going on in my head. Of course, by then it was wartime, and radio stations of course were under wartime regulations and talked a lot about the service people and things you should do. I always listened to a man named Wally King on KLX in Oakland, and he was talking about how the servicemen wanted records that had the tunes that they really loved and how hard it was to get them, because that industry used materials which were used in the war industry. I wrote Wally a letter and I said, "Because I'm young, and a woman, people think if I want to help serviceman they think I'm out to hook a husband or something. I would like to be able to do something, and scouting out these records sounds like something I could do." He encouraged me, and we became good friends. I told him, I guess, how much I wanted to work in radio.

One day he phoned and he said, "There's a job here that's open and here's the man to see, and call and make an appointment and come in, but don't use my name."

The man, the general manager, was a very strange guy. Anyway I called him and one of the things that the sales course had said was be persistent. Go sit on the doorstep and be persistent. So this guy would say, "Well, I can't see you Wednesday." I said, "How about Thursday?" So finally, I got an appointment with him and he said, "Well, I'm coming over to San Francisco to the Ad Club. If you want to come over to Oakland and ride across the bridge with me, I'll talk to you then." I said, "Sure." I told my boss that I was going, and I went over on the Key System, which was the best train system, you know, the best small, local train system in the world. It was efficient, it was clean, it was all the best things, but then I think it was General Motors who decided we needed busses. The Bay Bridge had been built with the tracks on it, so on the lower level you just shot along in this train. It was marvelous.

Anyway I went over, and in riding back, one of the things he said was, "Well, what have you written?" I said, "I haven't had much published." And he said, "You've had things published?" I said, "Well, I had a poem published in the *Examiner* and I had a little piece published in the *Call Bulletin*." Then he said, "But you've been published?" And I said, "Yes, but it wasn't anything big." And he said, "Well, come back and see me, whatever." And he hired me.

HICKE: He was impressed just that you had published something.

HOWIE: I was a published writer. Well, I wasn't really a published writer. I had written this little poem, which was carried in the *Examiner*. Anyway KLX was on the 21st floor of the Tribune Building. The only time I ever saw this man from the time he hired me until the day I left was standing waiting for the elevator. [laughter] And every time he saw me he would reach out and pat me on the shoulder and he'd say, "I hear you're doing a great job, great job, keep it up." [laughter] That was the whole conversation. I didn't work there all that long, but the whole time that was the whole conversation.

Another thing, in the broadcasting industry was a long-time radio man called Frank Cope. Frank called me one day and he said, "I know you're in San Francisco, and you work in Oakland, but there's a job open at KJBS," where he was a broadcaster. They also owned KQW, which is now KCBS. He said, "I'm coming over to get my hair cut." He always got his hair cut in Oakland. "So if you can come down and have a cup of coffee, I want to talk to you." He said, "There's a writing job open, and here's the man to see, and don't tell him I told you." [laughter]

I made an appointment and I went over, and I took the book of everything I had written while I was at KLX, a little binder. He went through that and I guess he was impressed.

HICKE: What had you been writing?

HOWIE: I had been writing everything that went on the air.

HICKE: News?

HOWIE: No, not news. I'm not even sure we had a newscaster, now that you mention it. There would be record programs, and one would be called At The Opera and I would write little things that went in between — either

I would talk about the acts or about the people. Then I wrote some commercials. They were the first commercials I ever wrote for radio.

One of the sponsors was a jeweler in Oakland, so I wrote these three pieces of copy, and the salesman said, "You take them over to him, show them and get his approval." I went over and handed this man these three sheets of paper; he looks at the first one, takes it, crumples it up and throws it on the floor, and says, "Nope." Same thing with the second one, same thing with the third. So I went back and re-wrote and re-wrote and finally we got something he liked. I thought, What could be worse than that, to have your first efforts thrown on the floor?

The job at KJBS was also writing. It was writing commercials, and what happened there was that the salesman would come in, he would have an account, and he would give you whatever he had got from the account, brochures or some of the things that the boss had said; then you would write the commercial, and he would take it and get it approved and it would go on the air. I worked writing for a year or so, and then the job as traffic manager opened up and...

HICKE: You don't mean...

HOWIE: Not traffic like driving down the road. It was scheduling the announcements, and in those days you had to be very careful, like you couldn't have an announcement for a Chevrolet dealer right on top of an announcement for Ford. Now you look on television and there are three different car manufacturers, boom, boom, boom. You couldn't do that.

We had several bakery accounts, and I had to be careful that the bakeries weren't next to each other, things like that. So I went along with that, and then one of the ladies who had a program on the air also had a small advertising firm. She and I were talking, and she said that they needed someone, that their writer was leaving. She and I talked and she hired me. I told my boss I was leaving, and I trained my replacement and I was supposed to start on Monday, and the Saturday before the Monday she phoned me and said, "Oh, I'm sorry, we found somebody with more experience, we're not going to need you." So I told my boss that I had no job and he said, "Well, you can come back." And I said, "No, I'm not going to turn around and do to somebody else what has just been done to me."

I went to the man who had been the boss of the lady who got the job; it was an opening for a secretary and I am not and never have been a

secretary. I type fast, I type pretty well, but this man wanted no mistakes and no erasures. I can remember writing a letter that he dictated. I typed it 16 times before I got it the way he wanted. He was a darling man. He was a Canadian, and he was so nice; so he hired me, and it was OK. We managed, but in the meantime I was still looking for something else.

MOVING INTO PUBLIC RELATIONS

HOWIE: I had a friend who had worked for a small agency which had the American Red Cross chapter as one of its clients, and they were coming up on the annual drive. They had some positions to fill. So I asked my friend if I should apply. She said, "You don't want to work for Glenn (Smith). He's a difficult man." And I said, "Well, I don't want to work where I am." I went to interview with this man, and I thought he was great, and he hired me. It was a radio contact. There was no television yet in those days.

HICKE: Radio contact for?

HOWIE: For the campaign to get the word to the radio stations. When I told Mr. Drennan, my boss at the time, that I was leaving, he cried. I said, "But Mr. Drennan, I'm a rotten secretary and you know it, and I know it, and it's just not the right job." He looked at me and said, "But I'm used to you." But we stayed friends. He was great to my daughter, Linda, because he would get these marvelous children's books in Canada, and on Christmas and her birthday he gave her these marvelous books. She was also into reading like her mother and grandmother were.

I spent that one drive with the Red Cross, and at about that time KGO was about ready to go on the air with television. And they were looking for someone. So I went and interviewed, and it was a very strict, strong interview, and they hired me in the publicity department to write promotional copy on the air. There were two of us. One wrote for on the air and one the press releases that went to the newspapers and magazines.

HICKE: For advertising purposes?

HOWIE: No, to promote the station. In my case to promote the things that were on the air at the station. I worked in radio and television, both. It was really weird, because the president would come out from New York or wherever, and he would give this big speech to all the employees. Then

he would say, "Some of you are working in radio and television, but that's like trying to advertise two cans of peas, so we're going to separate them." Then for a while we'd be separated and I'd just write radio and the other person would just write television. Then he'd come out again and say, "Well, we decided it would be much more efficient if the two were combined." [laughter] So they put them back together again. I did that for quite a while. I had a lot of fun with that because it was — as I keep saying when people talk to me, "I've been in at the beginning of so many things." So I was in at the beginning of television.

When we had been on the air for a year we did a promotion. At that time there were only five — well, actually, there aren't any TV reviewers anymore — but in those days there were five reviewers. There was one in San Mateo, and at that time there were three newspapers in San Francisco, and the *Oakland Tribune*, so there were five.

HICKE: Those were people who reviewed TV programs.

HOWIE: Right, just like movie reviews. I had grown up right near a wonderful bakery; as far as I was concerned they baked the best cakes in the whole world. So I had them bake cakes, and we sent them to the critics with little cards saying, "We are one." We got a little press on that. But the one that got the most press was for the second anniversary, and I got this idea of giving each reviewer two hamsters.

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

HOWIE: We got two-pound coffee cans, and we put a wrapper around them saying, "Now we are two, watch us grow." Then we called the SPCA [Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals] to make sure we did this all right, and we put in bedding, and we put in food, and gave them a little sheet of instructions for caring for the animals. Well, I've never had anything that was as successful as that. Because every one of those reviewers wrote what happened to the hamsters after they got them. One of them said the hamsters got into the couch and they'd never seen them again. They were funny. They were hysterical columns.

FIRST FEMALE WRITER/PRODUCER IN SAN FRANCISCO

HOWIE: I think by the time KGO TV was three years old, I asked for an appointment with Paul Scheiner, the head of the radio division in San

Francisco. I said, "I'm going to have to leave." And he said, "Why?" and I said, "Because I'm bored. I've done this job for as long as I want to, and I am really just bored. I need to do something else." And he said, "Looking at the station, is there anything else you'd like to do?" It caught me totally off guard. I said, "Sure, I'd like to be on the air." Everybody would like to be on the air. He said, "Well, we have a woman and we're not about to get another one. What else, is there anything else?" Without knowing anything I said, "Well, I think I could be a writer/producer. I can write." He said, "Well, that's interesting. One of the writer/producers just quit." I didn't know that.

Paul turned me over to Roy Grandeyk, the department manager. He said, "Do you know how to use a stop watch?" I said, "No." He would take me out on coffee breaks and lunch time, and taught me how to use a stop watch, taught me the terms that are used, and instructed me before I ever changed jobs. He was teaching me how to do this job. I knew it was called writer/producer, but I didn't know what they did. I didn't know what a producer did. So I was hired and, again, it was one of those things, I'm in at the beginning.

I was the first female radio writer/producer to be hired in San Francisco. Also, I think I was the first female member of the National Association of Broadcast Engineers and Technicians, which was our union.

HICKE: You've had so many different jobs and you didn't seem to mind leaving one and going to another. What kind of resistance did you find as a woman?

HOWIE: None; over the years I really got panned a lot because I was sort of a pioneering woman. I was often invited to be on panels, and by then we're talking about women's lib time when the women were burning their bras and doing all these ridiculous things.

HICKE: In the '50s and '60s.

HOWIE: Yes, 1950, I guess. I can remember being on a panel at Marin Junior College, and there were three of us. The whole audience was women, and I guess the other two women spoke first, and they described the horrible things that had happened to them. Then it was my turn and I said, "I have to admit I have never been discriminated against." There was a woman sitting right in the front row in front of me and she goes, "[hissing sound] Aunt Tom."

It was true. There was only one instance of discrimination as a writer/producer: KGO carried college football games, and I was assigned to be the producer at a game at the University of California. When I showed up, I asked, "Where is the broadcast booth?" and it's way up there, and I go up and I go in and pretty soon here comes a man who says, "You'll have to leave. No women are allowed up here." I said, "Well, I'm the producer from KGO." And he said, "You're going to have to leave." And I said, "My boss assigned me to this and I'm not going to leave." He said, "You can't be in the announce booth," which is where I was supposed to be.

They put me in a booth two doors down, and in order to see the announcer I had to lean over and peek through a window, and give my signals through this window. I went back to the station and said, "I think it's going to be easier if you assign a male producer rather than go through this every week. I don't care, I'm willing to do it, but I think it's easier for the station if you don't." All the engineers at that time were men. I had no problem there. It was a union job; I had to join a union. I joined the union, and I was a very faithful union member. I went to all the meetings. Eventually I became shop steward.

HICKE: Were there other women in the union?

HOWIE: Not then. Now there are many of them. At that time I was the first and only, and I was the first to become shop steward.

From being a writer/producer I went back to the promotion department, and then I left KGO, or ABC. I was actually working for the American Broadcasting Company.

HICKE: Where does ABC come in?

HOWIE: Every place I said KGO is also ABC, because KGO was the owned and operated station for ABC in San Francisco. So physically I worked at KGO but my checks came from the American Broadcasting Company.

By 1956-7, somewhere in there, I re-married. My husband's radio name was Ken Wallace, and his real name was Wallace Howie. There was a restriction on married couples, husband and wife both working for the station. I forget how we got around it, but we got around it. But then when I was pregnant with my second daughter, I quit voluntarily. Then I still did little odd jobs at home for other radio stations.

HICKE: You mentioned Don Blum as having some significance for you.

HOWIE: After I left the promotion department to be a writer/producer, Don became a member of the promotion department. We worked together for a number of years, and then stayed friends forever until he died. I still miss him. We talked every day. I could talk to Don about things I wouldn't talk to anybody else about. He was very levelheaded and sometimes a little too rigid. He would say, "Well, Millie, you can't do that, you know you can't do that. You've got to do so and so." So I would mull it over, and sometimes I would say, "Yes, he is right." And sometimes I would say, "Boy, is he off the beat."

But he was probably my best friend, which is how people mention Don with me. It was truly a platonic friendship, which people say is impossible, but it was. We didn't always see eye-to-eye. He was a Texan and Texans I think tend to have some beliefs that other people don't have, just as Californians have some beliefs that nobody else has. We didn't always see eye-to-eye but we stayed friends for 40 years maybe.

HICKE: And your second daughter's name?

HOWIE: Jann Howie, well Hayes now, as she's married.

VARIOUS PUBLICITY ACCOUNTS

HICKE: We're at the time you had just left KGO.

HOWIE: Then I left and took assignments. I guess I worked two Republican conventions; one would have been after Jann was born and the other I guess was the year she was born. I don't know. One was for NBC and one was for ABC.

HICKE: What was that like?

HOWIE: One of them was fine. But the second one was absolutely murderous, because the setup for the radio station was just off one of the main corridors into the hall. It was windows all the way. And the people going by would yell obscenities at us; they saw us as being liberals. Radio people were considered too liberal. I don't remember, but it was the one in which [Adlai] Stevenson ran, because my husband had a sticker, a bumper sticker. We lived in Marin County, and I would drive out to the Cow Palace, and I had to use his car in the early days because I hadn't

been assigned a car yet. I actually had people drive past and spit at my car going down the Waldo Grade. This I just didn't understand. Then they gave me a car, and I didn't have that hassle. But we still did have the people shouting at us through the window, and some of them banging on the window. They were a horrible crowd of people.

Then I guess Jann was a year old, maybe older — I have never stopped to think of some of these things and put them in chronological order; I'm not very good on chronology. But I took a part-time job at the local Marin radio station, which at that time was KTIM, and I don't know what it's called now. It was in San Rafael. I wrote copy, all the commercial copy that went on the air. I worked half a day once a week maybe, maybe every day, I don't remember. And my husband and I had separated. We went back together again later, but we had separated and I was living in Fairfax, and I had found this wonderful babysitter who took care of Jann, and I would write 16 pieces of copy between nine o'clock and one o'clock. Then I went home.

I stayed at KTIM until a friend who had worked at KTVU in Oakland took a job with a small advertising and PR firm. The PR arm was called L.C. Cole. He said that they were getting into a couple of large campaigns, health campaigns, and that he needed some help and would I come and do some work. Well, he was going through some very troubling times, and so he would not show up, and I was there and probably was the only one who knew what he did, so I just filled in. So he finally left and I worked for them.

This is where I worked on "K.O. Polio" and "Stamp Out Sickness." We had a lot of fun with that, because we found out that apes in zoos could also get polio. So we made a deal with the zoo, and we went out with our balloons that said K.O. Polio, and blew up the balloons and let the apes play with the balloons, and one of the veterinarians gave the ape an inoculation, and that was just unusual enough that we got good press. Who could resist this funny ape playing with the balloons?

HICKE: These were your ideas, I'm sure.

HOWIE: Yes, for the most part. I was big on what they called advertising specialties, pencils with your name printed on them. So we handed out huge pencils. They were an inch in diameter. We would go to parades and things, and we would hand out balloons. We went out to the zoo and we took fortune cookies. In the fortune cookies it had a little thing about getting your shots, and some of the fortune cookies had dollar bills

folded in them. Well, the people found out about this, and they would come behind the table, scoop the fortune cookies out on the ground then, and stamp on them, which really, really upset me. Every now and then somebody comes up with an idea where they are going to do something similar, and I get a cold chill because of the human tendency toward greed.

We gave out balloons in the Mission District one day at a theater opening, and some young kids came, and again they went behind me and were grabbing the balloons out of the box. I went over and said, "Look, if you want balloons, I'll give you balloons, but don't come and steal them." I guess nobody had talked to these kids that way before, because they put them back and I gave them some. I don't know how long the lesson lasted, but it was good that it went on.

Then other people left L.C. Cole for other jobs, and as one of the newer members of the staff, I would inherit these jobs, so I ended up with all these wonderful accounts like S & W Fine Foods, the Ice Capades, Paramount Pictures.

Paramount was another one that was fun, because again I could go into the advertising specialty thing, and we had one called something about the bees. It was a William Castle film and was sort of a horror film, and the advertising specialty man came in one day with these bees on a string and when you whirled them they buzzed.

We had them imprinted about this film, and we gave them out at this theater and gave them out for some reason on 4th and Mission, which was not a good place because there were a lot of derelicts there. But a couple of the guys, who were probably plowed, got fascinated by these, and so they would be walking up and down the street whirling these things. And we sent them to all these radio stations, and every now and then you'd be listening to something and in the background you hear this buzzing. It was a great success, but I don't know if it did any good for the movie or not. [laughter] So that was the sort of thing I really loved doing. I loved giving things away that were insignificant, that don't cost anything virtually.

HICKE: How long were you with L.C. Cole?

HOWIE: So we are now at L.C. Cole and then it changed its name a couple of times. It kept getting more and more separate from Lennen and Newell, and it became P.R. Pacific and then it became Lowry, Russom and

Leeper. Somewhere right after that third name change, S & W decided that they would move their account in-house. And so I went with it. Jann was getting older, I was getting older, and it had everything. It had a pension plan, it had health insurance, it had profit-sharing, it had all these wonderful things, and I thought this was my security job and I'm going to settle into this; everything is protected, it's a good salary and I like it and they like me.

Then the company was sold, and they sent a hatchet man, and his job was to cut costs. So I looked up one day and our finance director came in and said, "Hi, we need to cut \$20,000 out of your budget." So we sat down and went over everything, and we cut here and we cut there and we got the \$20,000 out. About two weeks later he's standing in my doorway again, and he said, "We need to cut another \$20,000 out of your budget." I said, "That's easy, you just let me go." He said, "No, no." I said, "Yes, yes, that's the only way. If you cut another \$20,000 out of the budget there's nothing for me to do."

Then the hatchet man called me in and said, "We'll move you into marketing." I said, "You won't move me into marketing because I don't do marketing." Marketing and PR are two different things, and up to this day I maintain that, although the line is more blurred now than ever; I'm not talking about 1968 or '70, I'm talking about right now. PR people are more involved with marketing than they are with PR.

HICKE: At that time where was the line drawn?

HOWIE: Marketing works with a different group of people with a different aim, a different goal. PR, you're offering something to the public without any strings attached, and the only hope is that you can maybe sell a few more cans of beans or get more listeners to your program, or whatever. Marketing is harder sell, hard sell. It's numbers.

HICKE: Determining the responses of the consumer?

HOWIE: Working with the sales staff. I've never had a bad episode with sales people, but I've always had in the back of my mind that sales people and I don't really get along. [laughter]

HICKE: You were one at one point. [laughter]

HOWIE: Yes, but people came up to the counter and said, "I want a pound of candy." That's not selling. When I was working at Walgreens and they

would have these promotional sales where you sold toasters, and you got so many points for selling them, I was a dud. Forget it. No way. [laughter] So anyway, we thrashed it out that I was going to leave, but they still needed some PR, so I took them with me as an account. My severance was wonderful. They gave me two months full pay, and two months half pay. I had a little bit built up in my pension fund, so I went home and told my mother and Jann, "Well, I can try it on my own." I know the date on this one. It was 1971.

FORMING MILDRED HOWIE PUBLIC RELATIONS

HOWIE: I also had agreed to work with Bob Lowry on a campaign for Union Carbide. I had done a lot of work for Union Carbide when I was with the agency, and I was mainly involved with their Linde Division, which is the one that made artificial gems. I was not involved with batteries or something they made that caused people to boo them. Anyway, so I did that and I had this little cushion. I had a friend, Caryl Saunders, who worked for about five of the advisory boards —nectarines, peaches, western iceberg lettuce —and she needed a writer. She called me, and I started writing for her. At that time there were very few food writers who weren't employed at a newspaper or magazine. There were some at PR firms. The word got around that Caryl had this writer; so then other people would call me and say, "Will you write?" So I also did a lot of work for other agencies.

HICKE: This was when you formed Mildred Howie Public Relations?

HOWIE: It was '71 when I went into business for myself, and almost immediately I started doing all these writing things for people.

HICKE: Were there other accounts?

HOWIE: Mostly the advisory boards. Because I wrote so much for so many different people, if I would travel to a strange city on the food day, Wednesday or Thursday, which was the day the food page appeared in most newspapers, and pick up a newspaper, it was not uncommon to see two or three things that I had written. What we did was a really great photograph with a really great recipe, and then I would write a story around it. If I were talking about peaches I might talk about peaches being traced back to the 6th century, whatever, and I could have fun with a lot of them too. So that was my main source of income. Actually my

first account, real account, new account, was Kokusai, the Japanese theater.

[End Tape 1, Side B]

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

HOWIE: In working with Paramount, one of the things I did was screenings for the critics. There were small screening rooms in downtown San Francisco, and we would invite the critics and show them a preview of the film, and we would give them coffee or whatever. So one of the critics was approached by the Kokusai and they said, "We need to get the word out about the film." So one of the critics suggested me and they hired me. Harold Iwamasa was his name. So I would set up screenings for these Japanese films. Then the critics would come and we would give them noodles.

HICKE: With chopsticks?

HOWIE: No, it's really sort of sad. Mr. Iwamasa is a very inventive guy. Noodles slip off a spoon, but you couldn't give them a fork. So he took little plastic spoons and a sharp knife and he cut little forks.

HICKE: Out of the little spoons.

HOWIE: Yes. He never patented that, but the little tines would hold onto the noodles. And we got good press on that. He was young — well, the theater is gone now. I think it became a Denny's, a restaurant. For a while it had a sushi parlor upstairs, and I think it had pool downstairs or something. But his main occupation was as an importer.

This is a funny story, not necessarily part of this. But he hired a Japanese gentleman from Japan who spoke very little English to be the manager of the theater, because he just couldn't take care of it. And I would meet with this man. I have forgotten his name. He would tell me about the films and give me material, some of the material was only in Japanese, and he would have to tell me what it said. So we were sitting there one day in a meeting and he said, "What do you think of skin flicks?" I thought, Oh my god, this word must be Japanese, what does it mean? And I puzzled and puzzled and puzzled and couldn't figure out what he was saying to me. He said it two or three times, and finally he rips out a broadside and he puts it down on the table and he said, "Skin flicks." [laughter]

HICKE: What was your answer?

HOWIE: Well, I think that I said that it doesn't fit our type of audience or something like that.

They stayed my clients I guess until they closed the theater. Actually, I did a story on the restaurant when they opened it, because it was the first — I'm not sure it was a Denny's but it was the first member of that chain to open in a Japanese area. That too is where I worked more with Don, because Don got involved with the opening of the Japanese Center, Don Blum. So he was the PR for the opening of the center and he did some very imaginative things.

He was the first one to bring in Shinto priests to bless the goings on, and at that time Justin Herman was still alive and still active in San Francisco in developing things for San Francisco. And the Japanese Center was one of the things that he had really backed. So there were a lot of people at that. They served Japanese food, and they had the Cherry Blossom Festival, and Don was active in that. At the theater we would stand outside and hand balloons to the people. So we worked together on a lot of things as well as just being good, old friends.

Where are we?

HICKE: The Kokusai had closed.

HOWIE: I would get one-shot things. I always got funny little one-shot things, like there was a man in San Rafael, Morton Scott. He was a pharmacist, and he had developed a body lotion called Making Love. Anyway I wrote an article about him and this body lotion which had overtones of sexiness.

HICKE: The article or the lotion?

HOWIE: The lotion. [laughter] He was also a health guy, and he invented a kit for stopping smoking. It was very good and a lot of the elements of that routine you see now on things advertised on television. He was all for good health, so we put together sort of a mini-health fair and got permission and held it in Union Square. Then instead of a Miss Making Love we had a Mr. Making Love, and we got this hunk, and put a ribbon across his chest saying Mr. Making Love. You know, we had a lot of fun with that. When it was all over and we were cleaning up, I said, "Well, what do you think?" and Mr. Scott said, "Ah, yeah." And I said, "Well, we had coverage by three television stations." He said,

“But there are five.” [laughter] But that was just a one-time thing, or a two-time thing that I did with him on that.

I’ve met a lot of interesting people along the way just in the writing phase of it. I was looking back on some of the stuff I wrote when I wrote for *Redwood Rancher* and I wrote about chinchillas and pygmy goats and cattle and cutting horses and Christmas in the wine country.

HICKE: How did you do the research for these articles?

HOWIE: By talking with people. Sally Taylor, who published *Redwood Rancher*, had all these contacts, because she sold advertising and knew everybody. She was, is, a vivacious, wonderful woman, and she would often give me the names. When I did the rabbits, she gave me a couple of names of rabbit breeders.

The chinchilla article, I don’t know if she found the chinchilla man or he came to her and said, “Why don’t you write a story about me?” In all of my writing, from whenever, since I started writing professionally, I’ve never written on spec. This is a very cocky thing to say, and I’ve been criticized for saying it, but it is so. I’ve always written on assignment and never have written on spec. I have never gone through what a lot of writers do with the rejections. I’ve never had to worry in that direction. Sure, people would send stuff back, and I would re-write it. And sure, I’ve had assignments where things have been changed so much that I have said that you can’t use my name on it. But absolute send it out and get a rejection slip, no. I’ve never done that, but I’ve been busy.

I found a notebook in my files the other day of stories that I started and never finished mainly because I got interrupted and I’d go off and do something to keep us eating and never go back to it.

GETTING STARTING WITH WINE PUBLICITY

HICKE: Do you have something to add before we go to MFK Fisher?

HOWIE: I guess we’re now into wine. I was writing heavy, heavy writing food, and there were no wine PR people at that time. I got called by this head hunter and he said, “I’ve been called because Schlitz has just bought Geyser Peak Winery and they wanted a liaison between their PR firm in Milwaukee and the winery, and I’ve been asked to make some

suggestions. Would you be interested in applying?" So I said, "Sure, why not?"

HICKE: Did we slip by Rodney Strong? Was that before or after?

HOWIE: [pause] It really was before. Yes, I guess before I got a call from the head hunter I got a call from Peter Friedman, who was an associate of Rodney Strong, and I don't know how Peter found out about me. But Peter said, "We have bought all this vineyard land and we have this little outlet in Tiburon, and we think we are at the point of needing some PR. Would you like to come in and talk to me?" So I did. At that time I didn't know wine from pickle juice.

HICKE: Never drank it?

HOWIE: Never drank it, nobody in the family drank wine. My mother tells the story of when I was three, somebody brought them some sweet sherry, and I got into it and got tipsy on it. But I don't have any memories of being three. [laughter] I can remember when my high school boyfriend graduated from high school, we went up to a wonderful restaurant called Topsy's Roost at the beach, which had a dining room upstairs and a dance floor downstairs and you got to the dance floor by going down this long slide. Anyway, he ordered a bottle of Champagne, and I remember we had the bottle of Champagne, and I remember that nobody questioned us. We just sat there. I was 16 and he was 17. We just bought it, they just poured it and we just drank it.

Aside from that, I don't remember. I think I used wine in cooking before that. You could buy wine for 68 cents a bottle with a screw cap. There was a wide range, but it probably all came out of the same tank. So I did cook with wine, and I did do some things with the Wine Institute; at that time there was still a Wine Advisory Board, and I formed an association with their representative, Marjorie Lumm, where S & W would do foods and recipes and she would do the wines, and we would do these events, usually at home economics conventions and things like that, because I worked on a lot of those.

HICKE: Dinners?

HOWIE: No, events for the attendees. You know, the American Home Economics Association must have had thousands of members, and this was a national convention, and a purveyor could offer to put on an event and then everybody would be invited to come. The only one I really

remember was when Marjorie and I were in this hotel back East somewhere, and we had this nice room for S & W Foods, and she had brought a representative to do a sampling of wines from the Wine Institute. People were just arriving, and here come these two guys with this thing in their ear and they say, "Clear the room, clear the room." And we said, "What do you mean clear the room? We rented this room for this event." "Clear the room, the president's here, clear the room." So [Richard] Nixon had arrived, and whether he was expected or not I don't know. And so that event died a quick death, and I never forgave him for it. [laughter]

HICKE: Now we're back at Peter Friedman's call.

HOWIE: Yes. So Peter called, and by then I had cooked a little bit with wine and I'd had this friendship with Marjorie and I'd done some of these things. I don't remember tasting wine at these things handing out whatever I was handing out. So we talked and I said, "Gee, that sounds pretty interesting."

HICKE: What did he say?

HOWIE: Well, mainly about that time Rodney had invested in these vineyards all over the place, and I'd never thought about wine coming from grapes, grapes growing somewhere, and all of a sudden I was making these connections realizing it was agriculture, and I'd always — my aunt in Soledad had an orchard, and we'd go there every summer, and we used to go down and pick fruit. And my great uncle used to grow sugar beets and tomatoes for Spreckels, and I'd go out with him when he turned the pumps on in the morning. I had this sort of natural love for agriculture. I got interested in this and I thought this was something that I should know about; so when I saw an article about wine I would tear it out and drop it in a folder. Then Peter said, "Well, we're not quite ready yet, but thanks for coming in."

III. GEYSER PEAK WINERY

GETTING THE ACCOUNT

HOWIE: So now we're to the head hunter, and the head hunter said, "Do you want to apply?" So I met with Jack Varick, who was the PR person assigned to Schlitz at the Ben Barken Agency. Jack and I set up an appointment at the Holiday Inn in San Francisco, and we were sitting having a cup of coffee, and Ben's plane is late so Jack said, "How do you feel about this thing and what's your interest?" So I whip out this huge folder and handed it to him that I told you about [full of wine clippings] and he took one look at it, started laughing and tipped right over backwards in his chair, and continued laughing right there on the floor, because he thought I was so funny that I had that. I don't think I met Ben then. I think his plane was so late that I had to go on and do other things. So then they called me and said, "Well, we've decided that of the three, you're the one." This was right before Labor Day.

HICKE: This was 1975, is that right?

HOWIE: Either '74 or '75. My mother died, and she was the only one that immediately knew, but it should be here in some of these articles.

HICKE: Before we get to Geyser Peak, I wanted to ask you about the state of public relations in the wine business.

PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE WINE INDUSTRY

HOWIE: When I went to Geyser Peak — it's easy to say there were no winery PRs. There actually were, but I don't think they carried that title. One was Margit Biever and the other was Paco Gould. Margit was — I guess her title was hospitality at Mondavi, Robert Mondavi. And Paco, I don't know what his real job was, but he did the first winery newsletter that I ever saw, and I thought it was great. I copied the style a couple of times I thought it was so great, and he worked for Charles Krug. And there were some wine writers.

There was a thing called the Wine Writers Circle in New York, which I think had about 18 members, and then there were various people dotted around the country who wrote about wine. Some of them just wrote newsletters. I shouldn't say just, because some of the newsletters were really great. Not many of them wrote for publications, because the attitude, until fairly recently, was always, "Why should we carry stories about wine when wineries don't advertise?"

For many years, actually on the food pages, if you didn't advertise, don't bother sending them anything. If you had the world's best recipe for Brunswick stew but you didn't advertise your chickens in their newspaper, forget it! I don't know if a law has passed or regulations or what, but it's not true any more. And now you find newspapers like the PD [*Press Democrat*] which has a full page of wine. But in those days there were very few wine writers, and one of them said, "You need to go and talk to Margit Biever; she'll help you." I called her and she was extremely gracious, "Come on over." We sat there and talked, and I said, "What do you do, and who wants wine PR?" [laughter] She was a great help, just beautiful about sharing things. I then had some idea about what I was supposed to be doing.

PUBLIC RELATIONS WORK AT GEYSER PEAK

HOWIE: Then Geyser Peak sent me out on the road with wine. To this day I don't know why they sent me to Placerville, but the first place I went with my bottles of wine and my press release about this new winery was to the Placerville newspaper. I think he was as mystified as I, because I can remember putting these bottles on his desk and him looking like saying, "What's going on here?"

HICKE: Was this at his office at the newspaper?

HOWIE: Yes, at his office at the newspaper. You know, it was a little newspaper; it may have been only a weekly. I went anywhere. If somebody said, "Can you?" I said, "Sure," and off I'd go. That was neat. I need to say that when Schlitz bought Geyser Peak it also bought Nervo Winery. And Nervo Winery for a while pretty much supported the larger winery. Nervo was the small one, and the man in the tasting room was Ralo Bandiera. Ralo was a natural salesman and inventive from a pioneering wine family. He did things like he asked the winemakers to create a good white wine, and he named it Winter Chill. I think they still sell it now at

Canyon Road, I'm not sure. And he did another one called Farmer's Red. It was done by the same lady who did the first wine road map, Sharon Licu. It had little bunches of grapes on it.

Ralo wrote a little newsletter, and the lady who worked with him, he named her Maria, and then the young man who lugged the cases out to people's cars, he gave him a name like Tony, or something like that. And he would write these newsletters about him and Maria talking about the wonderful polenta and rabbit that she made, and he would give you the recipe. Then he would have sales and he would sell cases of wine for \$18. My job was to go down, I guess just on the weekends, I don't remember, and collect the money from him, and take it up to the offices, which were in a little bungalow, and carry it upstairs to a closet and tuck it in a hole. And it was thousands and thousands of dollars at \$18 a case.

HICKE: How great a distance?

HOWIE: Only from Nervo to the bungalow, which was about three miles, maximum. I didn't walk; it was far enough that I took the car and I had a key to get in and closed the door behind me. So it was safe. Nobody ever knew it, only Ralo, the bosses and me. Those were fun days too. And because I was one of the few in the industry, anything I did was brand new. So the press was receptive to almost anything you wanted to do. If you had a media event, they would come, and they would write about it.

HICKE: What press?

HOWIE: The wine press. You didn't try for hard news. Once in a while there'd be a story that would fit into the business page. But mostly you worked with the wine press. And I think the PRs still do work principally with the wine press. We did not send out samples; that came later after there were enough wineries. See, when Geyser Peak opened, it was pretty much a rarity. There were some older wineries like Pedroncelli, and Dry Creek Vineyard was already in business.

HICKE: Seghesio?

HOWIE: Seghesio was not selling under a label.

HICKE: Right, they were selling in bulk.

HOWIE: So Geyser Peak had a label and a sales staff. They had a wonderful, in-house, sales staff. They didn't have distributors in some areas. I would

go out and do events with distributors and travel with the sales people to stores. So I got a very good grounding in the industry as a whole.

HICKE: Was this activity organized by the Schlitz people?

HOWIE: No, we had our own sales manager at Geyser Peak; Nervo sort of ran on its own. It was doing so well, and Ralo was doing so well that there wasn't a lot there, and as I recall it was not distributed very far. The local restaurants might have it, and the local stores.

One of the first events we had at the winery, the very first event we had after I went to work for them, they decided they wanted to have a lunch for their growers, grape growers. And they decided to hold it at Nervo, the old winery, which is still there, and they were going to have it catered by Claus Neuman from Los Robles. So I was in charge. They knew who the people were, so they sent out the invitations. I got the RSVPs so I would know what the head count was. Then Claus came up to look over what he had to work with. He had to know what existed, because there was not much there. There was the winery with an upper floor, which was almost like a loft, then a lower floor where all these big tanks were. So he came and I took him down there, and he took one look and he starting laughing and he said, "That's the only entrance to the second floor where we are going to have this lunch?" And there was this staircase — you had to be quite slender to get up it.

[End Tape 2, Side A]

[Begin Tape 2, Side B]

HOWIE: So he said, "I couldn't carry a bus tray full of dishes, or food, or anything up those stairs — there's got to be another way." So we walked around and there was this big window — hole, it wasn't a window — on the second floor on the side of the building. What we did was put a pallet on the forks of a fork lift, and then Claus and his food and his dishes would get on that, and it would lift him up. So it was a great event, and they all loved it. It worked out just perfectly, because no one expected the grapes to be coming in yet. It was a pre-harvest party. Well, the first truck arrived right after lunch.

I designed the tour of the winery, and I pretty much instructed the people in the tasting room how I thought they should work, and I had some hand in ordering gifts. I was involved in almost everything. And we were still building; everything wasn't finished yet. The tasting room certainly wasn't finished; so we were still building and we had events

when the winery was dedicated, and I know exactly when that was: April 24th, 1976.

HICKE: Are you going to discuss the events for the opening?

HOWIE: Yes, I even have a picture. [referring to pictures] Here's John De Luca from the Wine Institute, and instead of a ribbon we had a grape vine, and this is John De Luca congratulating George Vare after he cut the vine.

HICKE: Did you have food and wine at these events?

HOWIE: Always. Yes, always, little tasty things and wine.

HICKE: Who did the recipes?

HOWIE: It was all catered.

HICKE: And the winemaker chose the wines?

HOWIE: Yes, and at that time you didn't talk about pairing and matching. The winemaker was Al Huntsinger, and his assistant was Armand Bussone.

HICKE: Did they have quite a bit of input into the public relations effort?

HOWIE: They were my teachers; they were my tutors. I would go in, and somebody, maybe Jim, would say, "We're going to be releasing the 1974 [Sauvignon] in three weeks, so we need a release." So I would go in and say, "What am I supposed to find in it and what am I supposed to tell people?" So a lot of the impressions I have of wine are retained from those first tastes that I had of them. For example: if someone offers me a bottle of wine and they say, "Would you like a bottle of Chardonnay?" My answer is almost always no, because I'm not really hooked on the way they make it now with barrel fermentation and malolactic. It comes out sweet and, I don't know, bulky. When Al was making it, the first I tasted was stainless steel fermented, no malolactic, just this pure grape, fermented in this nice stainless steel, and it was crisp. The first thing you would notice, as Al said, it was green-gold in color; so always look for that. You don't find that in the ones that have been in the oak barrels.

HICKE: More like Burgundy style?

HOWIE: His were more like Sancerre. One of my clients was Ernie's Restaurant in San Francisco, and I had tasted Sancerre, so I actually did have a point of reference that I didn't know I had. But that style is what a lot of wineries are now beginning to go back to.

HICKE: Some time back I tasted a Chardonnay at Simi Winery, and she, Zelma Long, was making it quite austere.

SOME NOTES ON PINOT NOIR

HOWIE: The first Pinot Noir I ever tasted was at Geyser Peak. I guess in 1976 they released two limited edition wines. One was a Cabernet and one was a Pinot Noir. It must have been an absolutely incredible growing year, because those two wines were absolutely superb. And the Pinot Noir, again it was the first one I ever tasted — I went to Al and asked him, "What am I looking for here?" And he said, "When you put it in your mouth, it should feel like you're tasting velvet." Well, this is 20 years ago, 25 years ago, and I have to admit with all the Pinot Noirs I've tasted, with all the ones — Oregon, everywhere, I have never found one, besides that one, that made me feel as if I had velvet in my mouth.

Years later I went to an event at Sterling Vineyards. It was a press event. It was a three-day event, and on the last night of the third day, we were having a dinner, but it was going to be preceded by a tasting of Pinot Noirs. And everybody was supposed to pick out a Pinot Noir and bring two bottles. Well, of course, by then everybody at Geyser Peak had consumed their Pinot Noir. I finally found two bottles of this 1974 limited edition Pinot Noir, and I took it to this event. We tasted and then we all made notes, and then Bill Dwyer, who was the winemaker at Sterling at that time, commented on the wine and on the notes that we had made. And when he came to this one, he said, "This wine is obviously past its prime. Just look at its age. But this wine obviously was a marvelous wine when it was made." So I'm still looking for my touch of velvet when I look at Pinot Noirs.

GEYSER PEAK WINES

HICKE: So really you got your wine education at Geyser Peak?

HOWIE:

At Geyser Peak, yes. And it was a good education, because they made so darn many wines. Nobody needs that many. They had two lines at that time. They had the premium wine, which was originally called Voltaire, which became Geyser Peak, and then they had Summit, which was their cheaper wine. And they pioneered a lot of things, but they never stayed with them. I think it was bottom line, because George was an MBA and I think you never get over the bottom-line syndrome when that's your background. They were one of the first in the United States to make bag-in-the-box wines. We did a lot of good things for that. We told people how the bags were made, we told them how much better the wine was held in a bag because there was no way any air could ever touch it, and you know air is the thief of wine.

In Canada and Australia people buy wines to take to a picnic. We had Australian people come to the winery and they would say, "We don't understand why the U.S. audience doesn't grasp these things, because you don't see anybody going off to a picnic if they aren't carrying their little box of wine along with them." It really never caught on. It never really caught on big in Canada, I don't think, which is where we got a lot of our research. Geyser Peak were the first ones, and maybe the only ones, to do wines in cans. Little cans, I think they were pop top, I don't remember, and they were six to a carton. There's something about it. Even though you use food-grade metal, which is absolutely odorless and tasteless, people always claim, "I can taste the..." And people drink out of cans, so it may be that the exterior influence of the metal is influencing them. If they poured it in a glass it would be great, but it did not last any time at all.

Then they did a marvelous rosé, called Grand Rosé. They had a proprietary bottle which was shaped like a teardrop, and they made it in 750s, 175s and I think a smaller size, little bitty bottles like the airlines use. And once I saw those I said, "This is it. The airlines are going to drop dead over this, because it's such a great wine." I would take that wine to a tasting where there would be many wineries, and at that time one of the wineries down in eastern San Jose, Mirassou [Vineyards], I think, had a rosé and it was going great guns. It sold great. People would come to my table, and I would say, "Let me pour you some of this." "Oh, I never drink rosé." Or, "I already tasted it over there." I would say, "Just try it, that's why we have a spit bucket. If you don't like it, you spit it out. I'm not going to care because wine is something you either like or you don't like." Almost without exception, once they tasted it they would then ask you to pour some more. They would come

gratuitously, come back to the table later in the evening and say, “Yours is lots better than those over there.”

HICKE: Was it dry?

HOWIE: Semi-dry. It wasn't dry like a rosé of Cabernet is dry, but they were not sweet as most White Zinfandels are. But we got these little, bitty bottles and I said, “Airlines!” Well, I was doing something with Konocti, and a whole bunch of people there were from one of the airlines, Delta maybe. I don't remember, but Delta would have been a good one, because they're south and they like a little sweeter things. Anyway I took this wine with me, and when I told the guys that it came in these little bottles which they could buy to put on their airline. He gave me his card; this was a big wheeler dealer. He could buy them.

I ran back and told our sales manager. He said, “No, we're not interested.” The wine was already made. All he had to do was bottle more and sell them, but it wasn't a market that he was interested in following

DANTE BAGNANI

HICKE: Let me ask you about Dante Bagnani.

HOWIE: Dan's family, the Bagnani family, owned Geyser Peak for many, many years. They owned also Four Monks Wine Vinegar.

HICKE: Four Monks?

HOWIE: Four Monks. And they had a sign on their front gate that said, “We have no wine to sell; we drink it all ourselves.” They grew grapes only to make the wine vinegar out of it. It was and is an outstanding wine vinegar, several different flavors. Then when the family sold Geyser Peak to Schlitz, they kept Dan on as operations officer. Dan is best described as a pixie. Dan was a very kind, very endearing Italian gentleman, white haired, sparkling blue eyes, and a little white mustache. He was picture perfect. George Vare knew he was a treasure.

A lot of my work was going off somewhere with Dan to do some public appearances. Everybody loved him. I think I told you one time that I was on a plane and I looked up at the front of the plane and there's Dan and here's the stewardess and she wasn't paying any attention to anybody

else on the plane. She was yakking it up with Dan. You just adored him on sight, he was just a really kind, smart person, but a devil. He loved pulling people's legs. I don't think he even thought about it. He just did it sort of naturally.

One of my favorite stories is when we were up in Washington State and we went to do an interview with a food writer. She was entranced by this nice gentleman, and he was going on about how the grapes are grown and how the wine is made, and somehow the question of quality came up. He said, "We're so fussy that we have big tables, and when the corks come in we pour them on the table and we have ladies sitting around the table and they're inspecting the corks, and if they find a bad one they take it and pitch it in the bucket."

So we leave and we're walking down the street and I said, "Dan, I don't remember ever seeing that table." He said, "Oh, there's no table." I said, "But you told that lady. Dan you can't do that, you just can't do that." [laughter] Yes, he was a great one for those things. Then he wanted to go back and tell her it was a fib!

HICKE: What was his greatest influence on the winery would you say?

HOWIE: I think he convinced them to do some more kindly things than they might have. His emphasis was not bottom line. His emphasis was, "This is good wine, I'm proud of it, we're proud of it. Yes, we want to sell it, but we want you to like it," whereas somebody else might be saying, "Well, so-and-so is charging \$12 for their Johannisberg Riesling and we're only charging \$9, and ours is better than theirs; so let's raise the price." That sort of thing. It's a difference in thinking, a difference in approach. He had a lot of influence. If I wanted to do something, and everybody else was looking at it as being sort of crazy, Dan would support it. George was a good supporter too, but George had that hands off attitude of everybody makes up their own mind.

WINERY EVENTS

HOWIE: I can remember in this one meeting we were planning this event, and I'm in my old traffic-director phase, so-and-so is going to do this, so-and-so is going to do that, we need so many glasses, we need so many napkins. Then when we got to the next meeting, it was, "Did you do this?" And, "Where do we stand on this?"

We had this one event coming up, and one of the items was invitations, and I get this big silence and I said, “We have to send invitations, we’ve got this big list of people and we need to send invitations.” “No, we can’t afford invitations.” So we argued back and forth, and finally I remember I said, “I will pay for the invitations. We have to have invitations, and I will pay for them.” “Oh no, no, no, never mind. That’s settled. Cross it off.”

There were minor skirmishes, and they were friendly for the most part. I think we all ended up liking each other. I don’t look back on that and think of anybody who, if you ran into them today, you wouldn’t give a hug.

HICKE: Sounds to me like you just had a lot of ideas and innovative things that people weren’t quite ready for. I think change is hard for people, and I think you are a promoter of change, of newer things.

HOWIE: I haven’t actively done public relations for almost three years now. And you never lose it. You are someplace and you see something that a winery is doing, or not doing, and you say to yourself, “Oh god, they should be doing such and such,” or, “This is so great. They should be doing a story on this.”

I was at a winery over the weekend with a friend of mine who has been looking for a good Viognier. She likes Viognier but there are very few out there that are made in the style she likes. So every place that we went we tried to taste a Viognier. We were at this one winery, and one of the people who worked at the winery said, “Oh, we have a nice Viognier; be sure to taste it.” So we were standing in the tasting room and this lady comes up — and this was an events day where you have a lot of people coming through the winery, people who had never been in the wine country before — and she said, “May I pour some of our reserve Cabernet for you?” And I said, “No we don’t want to taste the Cabernet, but we would really like to taste your Viognier. My friend wants to buy some.” “Oh, I’m sorry. It’s not open.” And I said, “Well, I guess we can’t ask you to open a bottle.”

This was a weekend with a lot of people. She wasn’t going to waste that wine. If it was open, she could have poured it for somebody else as well. I just thought she should have smiled and said, “Oh, let me open a bottle.” So my friend went home without tasting, or buying, their Viognier. We went to another winery and bought some Sauvignon Blanc.

She wasn't just saying she was going to buy it; she was in a shopping mood.

I'm just trying to sort out Geyser Peak, because I was there quite a while. That was when Jan Mettler was working in the hospitality room, and Jan and I had a special kinship, because when I was working at KTIM, her grandmother was doing a program there. Her grandmother was Kitty Oppenheimer. She did these wonderful, in-depth, thought programs, sometimes with guests and sometimes just sort of op ed. So when I found out that Jan was Kitty's granddaughter, that made her fine in my eyes. She's bright and fast and has certainly made a name for herself in PR, international PR, because she's involved with this Slow Food movement now. And she was eager to do something besides just standing there and asking, "Would you like to taste this?"

When I told George Vare that I wanted to leave, he said, "Well, we'll have to interview." I said, "You've got someone right here in the winery who can take the job and do it very well, and I think you ought to give her a chance." And he did. She was great. She came up with some great ideas and did things, again, that nobody had ever done, even though by then there were a lot of wineries and a lot of competition for getting the wine writers. She works a room like virtually no one I've ever seen. If there is an event and there are 17 wine writers there, she will talk to 18 of them. [laughter] Good memory, wonderful person, lively personality, and she did a good job for them, a real good job.

HICKE: Let's talk about a few of these things like the Nature Walk, the Margot Patterson Doss Nature Walk.

HOWIE: I forget how I happened to meet Margot Patterson Doss, maybe through her books, maybe through the fact that I read her stuff. I don't know, somewhere along the way I met Margot, and I knew she walked. You are always looking for a different way to present your client to the world, and I thought that maybe we could get Margot to do a walk at the winery. I asked the vineyard manager, "Do we have a walk that we could tell people it would be safe for them?" So he took me and we walked from the bungalow, which was the office, and down between a couple of vineyards and then underneath the willows to the edge of the Russian River. It was clear enough that you could come back up another aisle in the vineyards on the other side, which made it a nice, comfortable little walk.

Margot was eager to do it. I don't know if she used it in her column or not, I'm not even sure that she used it in one of her books. I think she did. Anyway we did the Margot Doss walk and we started it with an invitational walk, "Come and join Margot in this walk." Then after that we had little signs "Margot Doss Nature Walk."

HICKE: Self guiding?

HOWIE: Yes, I guess we had a little pamphlet, I don't remember. So later, when I was working with Foppiano [Vineyards] she came and did a walk at Foppiano. The Foppiano walk still exists. Part of the reason that Geyser Peak's doesn't is that every year when the river would flood it would eat more of the land; so where we used to walk down and stand on the edge of the river, instead of the river being out there, it was now over here.

HICKE: It was eroding the walk.

HOWIE: It was eroding a lot of earth every year. But Foppiano was better situated and had no erosion at all. So she did come and do that and that still exists, and they still have a pamphlet in the tasting room that you can get to take the Margot Doss Walk, which I think is really neat.

HICKE: Is that where you did the moonlight walk?

HOWIE: No. One of the reasons that I moved north was that I had been at an event at Geyser Peak and it ended about seven o'clock in the evening. All the people had gone, and I did a walk around to make sure everything was secure and stuff had been cleared away. Just as I came into the parking area to get into my car, I stopped and looked out across Alexander Valley at Geyser Peak and just as I turned, the moon, just like a jack-in-the-box, came up, and it was perfectly round and enormous, that golden harvest moon. I said, "Yup, this is where I've got to live."

[End Tape 2, Side B]

[Begin Tape 3, Side A]

HICKE: We were talking about the Alexander Valley moon.

HOWIE: I was so impressed with this moon, this gorgeous moon across this expanse, that I said, "We should do that and let people sign up to come and do it." I guess I called the Santa Rosa J.C. [Junior College] and talked to the astronomer there, and he said, "There's a young woman in Healdsburg who drives taxi cabs, she's one of my students, and she

could plot exactly when the moon will come up.” Her name was Stephanie, and she did the plot, and we back timed from when it was supposed to come up, and we walked the path in reverse down to where we would all be gathering.

Then we invited people to come, and I think they paid \$10 because we fed them. And we would walk up and just as we got to this sort of landing on the top, the moon would come up. Except the first or second time we did it, we had a national writer there. And this guy was so intrigued with this, and he wanted to write this so badly, and he wrote for some big national magazine that we had never had been in. It poured rain. No moon, nothing.

Anyway it just died a natural death. I don’t know if Stephanie moved or we couldn’t get the plotting right or what, but we stopped it when it was very young. Yes, it was one of the things that I really wish still went on, but you know, if it’s going to rain... And the dinner that we gave them was in the fermentation room, so we had that nice ambiance.

Rich Catelli, who owned Catelli’s [Restaurant] at that time, made this fabulous lasagna, and so we would call him and tell him at what point we were in our walk and how many people we had, and he would cook these individual lasagnas, and then Gail Johnson, who was one of the Johnson winery family, would run down in her car and pick them up. As we came off the hill, here would be the bubbling hot lasagna, and one of the few things that I make that I really will serve with no qualms is a real simple cheese cake, and it ended with this cheese cake. Of course we had wine, and it was a great time. We charged \$10. But that’s not exciting enough for today’s audience.

HICKE: It’s not? It sounds exciting to me.

HOWIE: No, it’s not. You’d get some dedicated people who wanted to see the moon rise, but for one thing you couldn’t serve that dinner, and Rich is not there any more so you couldn’t do it there. Maybe you could do it someplace else.

HICKE: You probably couldn’t do it for \$10.

HOWIE: You could, but you wouldn’t make anything on it, because you had to pay the person — you didn’t have to pay me to guide the tour. You had to pay Gail to set it up while I’m with the tour. So it would be prohibitive. But people pay to have these things.

I got a notice yesterday that said that this winery which had not been open for several years, a decade maybe, was now going to be opened and tasting was now going to be \$25. Twenty-five dollars to taste their wine, and no food, and no souvenir glass; \$25 to taste their wine and have a tour. You could have a tour. I couldn't believe it. I had lunch with a friend, and he was just getting ready to go and I said, "Listen to this!" I couldn't believe it. Winemaker dinners used to be \$35 and that was a pretty good price for a winemaker dinner, there're \$70, they're \$125, they're \$200. Where do people get this money?

HICKE: I often wonder about that.

HOWIE: So you got that big bubble burst, so you don't have the Silicon Valley folk anymore.

HICKE: There's the fountain story. Wasn't that Geyser Peak?

HOWIE: Yes, that was Geyser Peak. It was another one of those things. You know, every now and then I would get this thing that I absolutely had to have or that I absolutely wanted to use. And somewhere I saw this wine fountain, very ornate, with little spigots that came out like this [gestures], and I think it had a thing in the top where you could put flowers. My daughter is looking for a picture. She is sure she had one.

I had a friend who was a manager of a National Public Radio station in Seattle and we were going to take Dan up to do an interview, so we set up three or four other things. One of the things was that Dave — Dave Crandall, who was the manager of the station — had planned a fundraiser. I said, "Oh well, I'll bring a fountain." I think we usually used Grand Rosé in it. "We'll have that and Dan will come up."

So I drove up ahead of time. I had found a place to buy the fountain. It was way out in the mission [district] in San Francisco, in the industrial section. Dan and I went out; he had never seen the fountain before, you know, he was going to go see the fountain. So we put it in my marvelous Dodge, it was four-door, and I just opened the back door and in it went in a big, huge box. So I drove up and a couple of days later Dan flew up and that was where we inaugurated the fountain. It was just enough of a novelty...

HICKE: Was it battery powered?

HOWIE: No, it had an electrical connection for the pump. Then we used it at various things. The picture I have was at a tasting at one of the hotels, probably the Sir Francis Drake; there were all the people tasting, of course, and we were in the corner, and we got a lot of traffic. I don't know what became of the fountain. I think they probably sold it to somebody for two bucks or something. You know, it's always sort of fun to look back and say, "At least I convinced them that they should get it. I convinced them we should use it." And people loved it.

HICKE: Yes, it was a success.

HOWIE: It was great fun. A lot of these things maybe were short lived, but they were fun while they were going on.

HICKE: That must be part of public relations, coming up with new things which might be short lived.

HOWIE: I don't think you can say that. I think we've lost a lot of that in PR. I think so much is duplication, so much is wanting to "one up." If somebody has a famous chef flown in from South Africa, you're going to bring in a famous chef from Russia. And he's going to cook something that he has never cooked before. I think things are more expensive, they're more upscale, for want of a better word. I don't think they're fun.

One of the things that Jan did was on some anniversary of Geyser Peak, she invited people to come, and she had wash tubs and they stomped grapes in wash tubs. That was a big event; people loved it and wanted to do it. OK, the Harvest Fair and a jillion other places now have a grape stomp. And it's gone now into a higher realm. It's not just wash tubs on the ground in front of the winery with people giggling and stomping. And people are trying for prizes. I wouldn't use the term sophisticated. I think some of the stuff we did was very sophisticated and we had the advantage of being first, but I think that the fun — that a lot of the research to do the things we did is missing. I don't think people apply to that. People ask me questions about things and I'll say, "There's a whole file in the Wine Library." They never follow up on it. I don't know why. If your job isn't fun, and you aren't making it fun or looking for ways to make it more fun, why bother?

HICKE: One more event I know about is when you had the Brotherhood of the Knights of the Vine.

HOWIE: Yes, in France there are several of these brotherhoods, and they're mostly people in the industry, and they're quite formal affairs where they wear cockade hats with big plumes in them. And they wear robes and they have ceremonies and there are grades. You're a knight or a supreme knight. There aren't many supreme knights, at least there weren't in the beginning. So they wanted to initiate Dan as a supreme knight. So we decided it should be at the winery, and they had just finished the flagstone courtyard with the fountain in front of the tasting room. So we decided we would hold the ceremony there, and the group of officers in their robes and plumed caps would come from the fermentation room across the driveway and then into this courtyard.

They came down the hill in their green robes and these big plumes, each carrying a candle, and then into the courtyard where they had the ceremony. The ceremony is sort of a kick, you know. You drink good wine and Dan, of course, being the expansive, "I'm going along with any party" gives the broad gestures, "Oh, that's wonderful wine." And then they say, "Drink this, it's water." And he makes these terrible faces, and then they take the big sword and dub him a knight. And so he became a knight.

And I am a lady. You know it was fudged. I knew them all, because I had worked with them practically since they were first formed, and I knew a lot of the people from Sacramento, and having been knighted as a lady, however it's done, I was pretty much in with them in the San Francisco chapter.

So the next thing I know is that they were going to present me with the Golden Vine, but I had to go down to the meeting in San Jose to get it. I'm still very good friends with them, and I get invited to some of the events and go to some of the events. I go as a guest quite honestly because I can't afford the events. These are people with money. So a \$70 lunch or \$90 lunch is a lot. But a \$70 lunch or a \$90 lunch for me means what, I'm not going to buy cat food next month or something? [laughter]

HICKE: That is a bit much.

HOWIE: But they say, "You did yeoman duty when you were young, why don't you come, we know that Mike Grgich would like to have you there." And I will go, but not much. I don't like to take freebies. My generation was not to be beholden to anyone.

HICKE: I have one more thing that you did: brown bag opera.

HOWIE: Every now and then somebody tries it. Maybe again it was Mirassou who does it. I know whichever one that has the theater in Saratoga does opera, but they also do other things. But these were recipients, I guess, of the Merola scholarship awards, so they were not known artists but they were excellent, excellent artists, and they did excerpts from operas. They didn't try to do a whole opera or Act I from Carmen. They probably did the most melodic parts of various operas — Traviata, Pagliacci and those. And somehow we decided we were going to do it.

I could be wrong, but people were invited to bring their lunch, and we presented it in the crush area, which was all black top. And what we didn't stop to think of was how hot that black top got. So we invited them to come and sit and listen to the opera, and they would scorch their little bottoms. So we found something — we went to a place that sells foam and bought a whole bunch of foam pads, and we would give them a foam pad to sit on. Years later I guess, after they did the picnic area across the road where they had all the grass, they did some brown bag operas down there too. That was almost worse, because they had puncture weed, a prickly grass, and it's got long spikes on it. If you walk on it on your bare feet you're going to have bloody feet. So they had to get in there and clear all that stuff out because you couldn't sit on that.

I'm sure there are other things that were much, much more interesting. I don't know. I did a lot of traveling. Things that I drove to were mostly in California. We bought grapes from vineyards in Santa Maria and I went down there a couple of times. We had growers in various areas. I don't recall going down to San Joaquin much. I flew to places like Cleveland, Washington D.C., and New York. Then when I was working with Schlitz I flew a lot to Milwaukee for meetings. Then they also owned C & D Ducks, and I started doing the PR for the Ducks, and that was based in Franksville, Wisconsin, so I went to there a lot.

HICKE: Did you find a difference in consumers in the various parts of the country?

HOWIE: One of the biggest surprises I had ever, I went to — I don't remember which state it was now, probably was Michigan, to an event and was introduced to a lady there, and she was introduced to me as the president of the wine club. I don't remember how many members they had, but they showed me one of the sheets from one of their meetings, a tasting

meeting. They were tasting wines from California that I could not get myself in California.

HICKE: How was that?

HOWIE: I have no idea, because it was illegal to ship them, because I had a friend in Cleveland who had a winery — Macy's wanted a program and so I wanted to do this tasting of wines from different part of the states, and I said, "I sure would like to have some of your Cleveland wines." So here comes this big box marked "china." Usually it said "vinegar."

But the knowledge was there. Everybody was thirsty for wine knowledge, and there's still a group called the Society of Wine Educators which fluctuates from being extremely good to being a waste of time. And in the early days you had a lot of very enthusiastic, non-opinionated people. They had no preconceived opinions. They weren't saying, "Cabernet is the best red wine, and it's got to be big and bold." They were tasting it, or they were saying, "Well, gee, I don't think much of that. What did you think of it?" Lots, lots more open.

Still, the general public is getting much better at saying, "I really like this wine. I don't care if it costs only \$4, and that some Cabernet costs \$100. I like this one." The biggest evolution that I've seen is that people are beginning to have confidence in their own beliefs and their own tongue and palate. They still look at the [*Wine*] *Spectator* and they still read Robert Parker and they read the little shelf notices in the stores, but they are more confident, because sometimes you see them reading the little shelf notices and say, "Gee, I had that and I didn't think it tasted of cherries and plums."

HICKE: Have we pretty much covered Geyser Peak?

HOWIE: I guess.

HICKE: Are there other things in the notes on the outline that we should cover?

HOWIE: I don't know. You know so much happened so fast. I wasn't just working for one person, or one company. I had about seven clients at any one time.

HICKE: Even while you were working at Geyser Peak?

HOWIE: Oh yes. They were just a client. I didn't work for the company. No, I was not an employee.

HICKE: I'm glad we got that straightened out.

HOWIE: My check came from Schlitz. Yes, I was hired as a consultant. I have never since I left S & W worked for someone. They've all been clients. I know I say I was at Geyser Peak, but actually I have always been an independent producer since '71.

HICKE: I think that's a good place to stop for today.

HOWIE: OK.

PICTURE CAPTIONS: see following pages

pg. i: top: Dino Barengo, Reverend Roger K. Smith, Dante Bagnani at "wedding" of Barengo Vinegar Co. and Bagnani's Four Monks Wine Vinegar

bottom: Michaela Rodeno, Big Ben Davidson, Millie Howie

HOWIE: "Among the people I most enjoy in the wine industry is Michaela Rodeno, president of St. Supery Winery. She and I would have what we called our 'giggle' lunches and come up with goofy ideas. Her winery made a proprietary wine called Panache, and we came up with the idea of publicizing Panache by holding a waiter's race in San Francisco as they do in parts of France. We invited local restaurants to enter their top waiters. The idea was that the waiter would run, with a tray carrying a bottle of wine and two glasses, to the end of the track, open the bottle, pour two glasses of wine and run back. It was a time race, not man against man. One of the judges was Big Ben Davidson of the Oakland Raiders."

pg. ii: Dante Bagnani filling the famous Geyser Peak wine fountain with rosé wine at tasting in San Francisco.

pg. iii: Otto Preminger and Millie Howie

HOWIE: "For this picture I want to refer back to the portion of the interview in which I mentioned Glenn Smith and the "difficult" men with whom I worked. Film producer Otto Preminger could be very difficult, but what I had learned with Glenn was that people considered difficult knew what they wanted, told you what they wanted, and as long as you performed, you got along just fine. Another thing about all these gentlemen was that they and I seemed to have the same sort of quirky sense of humor, and in most of the photos of me with any of them we are both laughing our heads off."

pg. iv: top: Howie in her home office in Alexander Valley. Ca. late '70s, early '80s.

bottom: Howie and Mr. Von Pertz.

HOWIE: "In the early days everyone was a wine educator. If someone asked you to come and speak to their group, you went. This photo was taken at a presentation in southern California. Oddly enough, what Mr. Von Pertz and I were discussing was cultivation of prune trees."

pg. v: top: Howie holding Golden Vine Award as presented at San Jose chapter meeting of Knights of the Vine. 1985

bottom: Howie and Raymond Burr.

HOWIE: "My third 'difficult' man, Raymond Burr, and I hit it off just fine, maybe because we are both Geminis. He could be very impatient, and one day when I stopped by to see him, he pushed a group of slides across the table to me and said, 'Pick one.' When I wasn't fast enough, he reached out and pulled them all back and tossed one onto the table. 'That's it,' and that's how a funny little green orchid came to be name the Millie Howie."











IV. OTHER PUBLIC RELATIONS ACTIVITIES

WORKING ON VARIOUS ACCOUNTS

[End Tape 3, Side A]

[Interview 2, November 7, 2003]

[Begin Tape 3, Side B]

HICKE: Yesterday we ended up with Geyser Peak and maybe today we should start with what other accounts you were working on at the time.

HOWIE: It's hard to remember what I was working on.

HICKE: Here's a few: Foppiano, Korbel [Champagne Cellars].

HOWIE: Well, those came later. When I finally stopped working with Geyser Peak, I went on doing the Ducks, the C. & D. Ducks, which were also owned by Geyser Peak. And I think I was still doing Kokusai Theater. I think they were still open then. But I usually had seven or eight clients at a time, and they changed. Some of them were projects, and when I finished the project I would move on to something else. So I really don't remember. I thought to myself, Gee, too bad I didn't keep all my tax forms, because I could have just gone through them and told you who I was working for and when. But I didn't. I kept them maybe four years back, but that doesn't tell you anything. But they were varied.

When I stopped working with Geyser Peak and started working with Foppiano and also worked with Korbel, my rational was: one made still wine and one made bubbly. So it wasn't like I was taking two potato chip accounts and fighting against myself. I pretty much worked with them for about four years.

HICKE: Why did you stop doing work with Geyser Peak?

HOWIE: I don't know. Just saying I got bored is not good.

HICKE: You needed a new challenge?

HOWIE: I think that I needed to move on to something else. I'm not sure I intended to do another wine account. But I knew the Foppianos and I really liked the family, and I liked talking to them and finding out what they were doing. You know, it is a family-owned winery, and that's different. Maybe there was an element in leaving Geyser Peak because it was more corporate. It had come to the point of where you had a table of operations, an organization chart, and I was way down here, and I really felt that I didn't have the same communication with all the other little boxes. And that has always bothered me.

With Foppiano you met with the two Lous and talked to them and found out what they were doing. When I first started in PR, I was taking all my own photographs, and so that was fun too, because I was taking photographs of family doing something that they loved doing. At that time they were just building the tasting room, so we did a couple of nice stories on that. And we did some of the historical things about Mr. Foppiano being born. You know, the office is actually the room in which he was born, and all those things.

HICKE: I well remember the story of Prohibition when they had to dump all their wine and it was running down the road.

HOWIE: Yes, and I think there are pictures of that which are in the Wine Institute file with the wine gushing down the side of the road. Korbelt again was a family operation, an entirely different family feel. I was working with them just when Adolf was transferring the operation to Gary Heck. So that was interesting. In the history of it, maybe if I had not gone the route I went, I might have ended up doing research, because I think I like to dig and find out things. I think what attracted me to both those wineries was the long history of what they had done and what they were doing.

HICKE: Did you use that history in your PR work with them?

HOWIE: Oh, yes, always. I think I was working for the Sea Ranch at that time too, and they were in the midst of having to comply with the Coastal Commission's free access to the beaches. I still have — because I think somebody will want it some day — I still have the historical four-part story that I did. I never sent it out as a four-part story, but I wrote it in four parts, starting with the Indians and the sheepherders, and as it became a planned community, and probably right into the Coastal

Commission hearings. That sort of thing is always what I wanted to do and every time I took an account, the first thing I wanted to do was sit down and go back as far as we could.

I think this is partly why people still ask me to write, because I still do that, if it's pertinent, I mean. If a guy was hired yesterday as winemaker I'm not going to — I will go back to when he first came into the industry or what his background was. Did he have wine on his mind when he was 13 and in junior high, or what? But not the real digging, the first winery and the first plantings and all those things.

HICKE: I assume these new accounts came to you by word of mouth? Is that correct?

HOWIE: Yes, again, I know it sounds cocky. I remember two accounts that I went after. I forget what the winery was, Beaulieu maybe, somebody, a winery that had just been bought by some corporation, so maybe it wasn't Beaulieu, and they wanted to hire someone, and they were offering a lot of money. I thought that I wouldn't have to have any other accounts, there would be enough income. So the lady who was doing the — I guess she'd be called the human resources person — she was doing the interview, asked me if I would apply. So yes, I did occasionally write a presentation.

In fact, when Foppiano decided at one point that they wanted to change, that they needed fresh blood, they said, "Make a presentation." I have a file called presentations, so yes I did, in a sense, apply for certain things, but usually at someone's invitation. I didn't just suddenly hear about something and apply for it.

HICKE: You were talking about Korbel when I interrupted you.

HOWIE: I was saying that the difference between the two, there was still the history, there was still the family involvement, but the products were so entirely different, and the goals were different. Korbel was making 1,300,000 cases of Champagne a year and so they had a different problem of selling this, always fighting the French thing: it wasn't Champagne because it wasn't made in the Champagne district. For a long time Gary and I were both very adamant that it be called Champagne, but I notice now that Gary is now calling it sparkling wine.

HICKE: Makes you wonder what they are going to do with port or sherry!

HOWIE: Well, I don't think the port people are as together, and I don't think the port people care that much. I think that the Champagne is very special; it's like Roquefort. Roquefort won, and that's what maybe encouraged Champagne, "Oh boy, if Roquefort can say you can't use my name unless it's Roquefort cheese, then Champagne can do the same thing." It doesn't matter. People call it Champagne. So what the heck.

HICKE: So you had a much larger amount of wine to promote at Korbel?

HOWIE: And a different sort of promotion, because it's looked on as a wine of celebration. Your educational process is to convince people that you can drink it any time and it's good with everything. You're not saying, "Cabernet is good with wild fowl and venison." You're saying, "Champagne, you can toast the host with Champagne at the beginning of the dinner, and drink Champagne clear through.

I don't think I ever consciously thought — I would give people a plan. I would say, "This is what you need to do. You need to have biographies, you need to have photographs, you need to have a fact sheet that puts everything on one sheet so somebody can look at." So when I made presentations this was always part of it, and what I thought were the prime targets for a press kit. Later I worked with Ed Gauer, who was a grape grower; Ed, I guess, was one of my favorite accounts. Ed owned Roos Atkins clothing stores in San Francisco. His history way back was in a hat factory, a family hat factory on the East Coast somewhere, and he had really come in and built up Roos Atkins into a small but very effective chain.

He decided at one point that nobody knew who he was and so he needed some PR, and somebody suggested that I call him and talk to him. Somebody suggested that we get together. So he said, "Why don't you come and have lunch with me at Catelli's and we'll talk? But I don't think it's going to work because they tell me you're a liberal." Ed was a very staunch Republican, a Ronald Reagan friend, and all these inner working things. But he said, "Come and let's talk." So we're talking and I said, "You know at one point I worked at Roos Brothers." So he said, "No." So then we had all these people we knew in common. Pretty soon he forgot that I was the enemy, and because we had these close ties — but for Ed, the thing was, he wanted people to know who he was and what he was doing, because he loved his acreage, he loved his vines.

He would take me on tours of that vineyard in, I guess, a jeep, and he would drive right up to the edge of a canyon, and he'd say, "Look at

that.” I’m shivering in my shoes looking at that. After a while I got the feeling, he knows what he’s doing, he knows where he is, and I finally — he was uncanny, because one day “I want to show you all of the land.” He had 500 and some acres. And all of the land was not planted to grapes. A lot of it was still very wild.

HICKE: Where’s his vineyard?

HOWIE: He doesn’t have it anymore. It was sold a couple of times and some big guy has it now and I don’t remember who. Maybe Kendall-Jackson, but I don’t think that’s it. But it went from Red Winery Road clear over to Pine Flat Road, which was miles away. So one day he said, “Let’s go, let me show you the rest of the ranch.” So I get in the car and off we go. Well, one little hill looked like every other little hill to me, and we’re going along, and he says, “Oh, the last person who drove this took the radio out and didn’t put it back.”

So here we are in the little car in this wild area and we’re going along and he says, “We turn here” and such and such, and so and so. So sure enough, we turned there and it was like he said. We came to a couple of fences with gates in them, and he wouldn’t let me get out and open them. He was absolutely the perfect gentleman, “No, you stay right there.” And he’d get out, open the gate, and we’d go through, and he’d go back and close it. We were going through this totally uncharted area, and by gosh, we came out on Pine Flat Road just where he said we would. He was just uncanny. And he really, really loved it.

He and Pat Paulsen were two outsiders in the wine industry who absolutely loved the soil, the plants. I can remember taking a picture of Pat Paulsen kneeling down, or squatting down, running the soil through his fingers with this beatific smile on his face. He and Ed, I think, of all the people I met who are next to the soil, were truly, truly in love with every grain of dirt in those vineyards.

Ed’s goal was to have people in the world know who he was and what he was doing. And at that time I had a friend on the *Chronicle* who wrote in the business section, and he and I had worked on a story about Korbel a couple of years previous, and so I pitched him on the idea of a story about Ed Gauer coming from the clothing industry and being a magnate in that area and now growing wonderful grapes that were now becoming premium wine; eventually he had his own label. It ran, and Ed thought that was marvelous; he was in the *Chronicle* on the business page. So goal accomplished.

HICKE: That was it then?

HOWIE: I worked with him off and on, I guess, through the introduction of the wine, the label. Then it became mission accomplished, and we stayed friends. I would get invited to his Christmas party, things like that. But he no longer really needed me. He had done what he wanted to do. The wines were good and they were selling and everything was fine.

HICKE: OK, any other accounts that stand out?

HOWIE: A lot of what I was doing was writing. I wrote for a lot of different publications. Most of them were trade publications, and some of them are probably not in existence any more. I wrote a monthly column for *Top Shelf* for a couple of years, and I wrote a monthly column for *Price Line* in Massachusetts for a couple of years.

HICKE: Were these wine columns?

HOWIE: Wine, yes. The idea behind both of those series was: here's what somebody is doing that works, and you can adapt it to your own situation. Then I wrote for three, almost four years, I guess, I did a PR column for *Vineyard and Winery Management* and...

HICKE: What period are we in now?

HOWIE: I guess it's in the '70s, and early '80s. I could look at a file because the dates are there.

HICKE: It's not crucial, just approximately.

HOWIE: Well. Let me get the *Vineyard and Winery Management* column. I would like to take those and turn them into a book. September '86 to maybe August '92. But you know, I gave up on the idea, although I think it's still valid, but my way of doing PR stops at the electronic point. I was not doing PR when it became common to send things by email. I understand fax; fax and I work fine together. As a writer I don't want my email cluttered up with a press release from somebody I haven't invited a press release from; maybe it's dull anyway — 2003 just released — so that, to me, isn't something to send by email, and I have this funny little resentment against having to print out something. If I want to read it I have to print it on my printer with my paper in order to read it. Why can't they send it to me already printed and I will read it? Anything I don't file in my own file goes to the Wine Library. It's not

wasted. Anybody who sends me something, they're not wasting their money and their time and stamps. But I really have this funny little thing: why are you cluttering up my email with your stupid press release?

SOME EARLY WINERIES

HICKE: Let me go back. You told me about some early wineries. I asked you to recall some that aren't too well known, if you could talk about them.

HOWIE: We talked about Ralo Bandiera [Bandiera Winery], and Balverne [Vineyards] were a group of people who started — the physical location was an old Martini property I think.

HICKE: In Sonoma?

HOWIE: It was in Windsor actually, back in the hills on the same side of the freeway as the new part of Windsor, and it was very historical, the original Perelli-Minetti winery. And Balverne had two winemakers: Doug Nalle, who now has his own winery, and John Kongsgaard, who I think does managing of vineyards and wineries and things in Napa. They were both marvelous winemakers, and the wines were absolutely top. The plans were — there was so much land and there was a natural little creek with woods, and part of the idea was to have a little nature preserve which people could walk through when they visited the winery. It never got that far, and I think maybe there was some infighting, but anyway it folded. Everything disappeared. The label disappeared.

They made a wine, a blended white called the Healdsburg, which nobody thought would be accepted by the BATF [Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms] because it had the name of the city in it. But it was approved and it was a lovely little wine. I had tried since to interest other wineries in reviving, maybe not the wine but at least the name of Healdsburg, and I'm sure they could buy it from whoever owns it, but I'm the only person who thinks it's a great idea.

I get these funny little ideas. For instance, in the early days what my friends called fur-lined bathtubs. Porcelain bathtubs are notoriously slippery and cold and unpleasant; somebody came up with an idea: this guy lined the bathtub with sable. I thought that was such a cute idea. I'd come up with these crazy things, like the Healdsburg thing. Then there was a little automobile, a two-seater, and I actually even wrote to the

company, and they said that when they started producing, “Since you’re out there, you can have the San Francisco territory.” Well, you can imagine this little three cylinder car going up San Francisco’s hills.

HICKE: OK, I’ve got Cambiaso, which became Domaine St. George.

HOWIE: Cambiaso was an old family winery, and when they finally decided they were going to sell, they sold it to, and I really should look this up because I don’t know...

HICKE: I have Bob Fredson.

HOWIE: He’s the winemaker.

HICKE: And Somchai Likitprakong.

HOWIE: OK. Where is he from?

HICKE: Thailand.

HOWIE: I think it was his uncle who bought the winery and put Somchai in charge of it. It’s an enormous winery now.

HICKE: Yes, it’s Domaine St. George now.

HOWIE: It’s Domaine St. George and it’s a huge property which virtually nobody knows anything about, and it sells a lot of wine. Somchai is still in charge and Bob Fredson is still the winemaker. Bob is from an old Dry Creek winemaking family, which goes as far back as the Foppianos I’m sure. I think they were mostly growers, and I’m not sure that they even had a label.

HICKE: What did you do for them?

HOWIE: I didn’t do anything for them except visit them and write about them. If you want to call Gauer a winery, Gauer was the last winery I worked for. I have done single stories for other wineries, but mostly my association with wineries now and for the last several years anyway is that I write about them.

WRITING FOR PUBLICATIONS

HICKE: For the newspapers?

HOWIE: I write a regular column in the *Healdsburg Tribune* and I write regularly for *Wine Country This Week*. I do a lot of writing for them. I've been writing for them for 18 years.

HICKE: Wine Country This Week?

HOWIE: Yes, it started out as *California Visitors' Review*, then a couple of years ago it became *Wine Country This Week*, which broadened the subjects that they could carry and talk about. So I've written for them forever.

HICKE: How do you decide what to write?

HOWIE: They tell me. They send me a fax or they send me an email and they say, "Here are your assignments for..." I got one just the other day, "Here are your assignments for November." There are three things: there's a winemaker profile, there's a tasting room of the week and there's a feature. And sometimes what I call a mini-feature, I don't know what they call it, when it's something about non-wine, like an inn or a store that deals in interesting merchandise. So every so often this fax will come and say, "Here, let me know if you don't want to do this."

At one point I decided I wasn't going to write anymore, I'd done this, I don't want to do it any more. So I told Doug Martin, who owns *Wine Country This Week*, I didn't want to write anymore and I said, "I'm just tired of driving around and all this." He said, "I'll tell you what. You take off until the first of September and I'll call you, and we'll talk about it then." Doug is not known for being the best-organized person in the world. So I thought that's it.

The first of September here comes the call, "Well, how do you feel? Have you had enough hiatus?" So the agreement was that I would just do stories in Sonoma County so I wouldn't have to keep driving over the hill to Napa. Well, that lasted three months maybe. [laughter] Still, pretty much what I write is Sonoma County. And it's what my wish is to write, basically Sonoma County, North Coast. Well, not North Coast but California; I love to write about the Sierra Foothills. I used to go up there, they used to have a grape day and I went up to their grape day, which was really fairly technical, and you'd march around in the

vineyards and they'd have speakers talk about nematodes and that sort of thing. I just thought that if you were going to be part of this you needed to gather as much information as you could. And my mother was born up there, so I felt this tie, so I would go up every year.

I also write an abbreviated "Wine Words" column once a month for wineontheweb.com. This site is an extremely well-done site created by Andrew Jones, the Flying Wineman. I have no idea how he and I became acquainted. I know I did some booking of interviews for him on one of his trips to the U.S. some years ago, but can't put a date to it. About a year ago he asked me if I'd like to write a column, so of course I said yes. My picture is there with a little biographical note and then the column. When I went to England a few years ago, I visited Andrew and his wife, Branwen, and son, Huw, and also visited a couple of wineries in the area.

REDWOOD RANCHER MAGAZINE

HICKE: Before we give up on the topic of writing I would like to go back to the topic of *Redwood Rancher*.

[End Tape 3, Side B]

[Begin Tape 4, Side A]

HOWIE: OK, *Redwood Rancher* was an agricultural magazine, and Bo [Simons, Wine Librarian at the Healdsburg Wine Library] has some really old editions of it. It went out of publication for a while, and it came back. I'm not sure Sally Taylor, who was the owner/editor when I first started writing for them, was the one who brought it back or whether she then bought it from whoever brought it back. Anyway Sally was the power: bright, curious and just a really super young woman. Again it was a case of, "I've heard about this guy, Limousin, raising cattle over on Chalk Hill Road. Do you want to go and do a story?" This was an expanding thing for me as I could do all sorts of things that weren't wine.

HICKE: So this was agriculture?

HOWIE: It was agriculture based. I did stories on some of the grape days that I went to at various places. I did articles on people who were raising unusual crops. Sometimes I'd hear about something and I'd say, "Hey, what do you think of this?" And we'd do it. I remember I did one, it was a young man who was growing produce organically like the Farmers

Market people do. I thought he was a great story. So I talked Sally into doing it. His name was Mark Leinwand. I've still got a copy of the story — his mother, Rita, was a wine writer, a very good wine writer from Los Angeles, and sort of border-line upper crust.

I went over and did this story and took the pictures, and Sally ran one of the pictures I took on the cover of the magazine, and a couple of other ones inside. The next time I saw Rita she absolutely collapsed in laughter and she said, "Millie, how could you do this to me?" She had seen the picture. Of course, I had just seen Mark standing there in his field of produce, but she had seen Mark standing there with a hole in his jeans, but it didn't upset her. She just thought it was pretty funny. That was her cover boy. That was the sort of thing that I did for Sally. Mostly unusual stuff.

HICKE: This was in the early '80s, '83?

HOWIE: It would have been earlier than that.

HICKE: I have '83 to '85 that...

HOWIE: Yes, that's accurate. I bought it, which was one of the big mistakes of my life. I'd be very well off now if I hadn't bought that magazine. I enjoyed it. I look at it now, and it was way ahead of its time. There are articles in it that no one else has done, even to this day. There were articles where we were the first people to write about it, to carry it. It was a good little magazine. We did one of the first guides to the wine country and almost got sued by Marvin Shanken of the *Wine Spectator*, who had bought the guide from Sally. I didn't know she had sold the guide separately. Marvin Shanken called me or wrote me and said, "If you publish that guide I am going to sue you." And he panicked me. So I went to my art director and said, "Here's the original guide, make sure that if he has three columns that we have two. Be sure that if he uses Ariel type that we use Helvetica. I don't want to see anything similar, number of pages, nothing, anything that looks like it."

I thought it was a good guide. It had a little map, we did the whole thing — I got all the names of all the wineries from the BATF, and sat my mother down in the kitchen with this list of wineries — well, I had sent them this letter and a form to fill out and send back. And a lot of them did. And those that didn't, I sat my mom down in the kitchen with the list of people who hadn't returned the form and she called them and told them we needed this information. I thought it was a pretty good little

guide, but by the time it was time to do another one, I knew I was floundering, and I was never, ever going to come up for air financially if I stayed with it.

HICKE: You changed the name to *Wine West*?

HOWIE: *Wine West* because I wanted it to be wine and not a general agriculture magazine. I have a friend who has *Wine East* and I thought that would be fun, he has *Wine East* and I have *Wine West*. And when I tried to register the name, the copyright people said, "No, you can't do that because of *Wine East*." And I had a letter from Hudson saying — his name is Hudson Catell, "I have no problem with this. She is going to cover an entirely different area than I am." Then is where I think I changed the name to *Wine of the Americas*, which is also a copyrighted name because that was the name of Leon Adams's books. I think his was *Wines of America* maybe. But it was close enough that I was probably going to run into the same thing again.

By then I had long since run out of money, but I had an unexpected inheritance and it took the whole inheritance to pay off the bills, but I took nobody down with me. I paid my printer every nickel I owed him, and my art director. The writers got paid the day that the magazine came out. I just sat down and did the word count and sent them a check. I have no regrets. You know it would have been nice not to have to give \$60,000 to my printer in default bills, but it happened and it's gone and I'm still here.

LEON ADAMS

HICKE: Speaking of Leon Adams, can you talk about him?

HOWIE: Oh, Leon was great. When I first started working at Geyser Peak, Leon had finished the first edition of his book. He was the plum writer who you wanted to get to all your events. He didn't necessarily write about your winery, but he had to know about it. And he knew about everything. I hadn't met him, and I was at a wine tasting in a hotel in San Francisco, and somebody said, "Oh, Leon's coming later." I said, "Oh, I haven't met him; point him out to me when he comes." They said, "Sure."

So pretty soon he arrived, and I went over and introduced myself, and he said, "Have you tasted all the wines?" And I said, "Oh, I can't do that, I

have to drive back over the Golden Gate Bridge.” He said, “My dear, you spit.”

When I first came up here and first got involved with the wine community, I joined everything. I became active in the Farm Trails, I joined the Geyserville Chamber of Commerce, and all these things and somehow got the reputation of being the person, “Go tell her to do it and she will do it.” So the chamber president came to me and he said, “We want to have a wine night, we want to have Leon Adams. You know Leon, so get him. Have him come up for the April meeting.” So I called Leon and said, “The Geyserville Chamber of Commerce wants you to come and be their speaker. He said, “I’d love to do it but I don’t want to drive that distance and back.” “That’s OK, I’ll pick you up.” So I went down and I picked him up.

HICKE: Where did he live?

HOWIE: In Sausalito. I brought him up, and before the meeting there’s an open bar, and he said, “I’ll have a glass of wine.” I went out to the bar in all my innocence and I said, “We’ll have two glasses of wine.” The bartender said, “We don’t have any wine.” [chuckles] Somehow they were going to have it at the table or something, and we did get a glass of wine for Leon. It was a successful evening. I drove him home, and it was one of those nights when we had a terrible tule fog like they do in Sacramento. Right down to the ground. And it’s like traveling — there’s some old movies where the people are on a ship but they’re really souls, they’re dead, but they’re being transported. But that was the feeling of this. It was so hushed and I think it led to getting acquainted.

Talking about your early days, what you were trying to do, and I think that that gave us a friendship we wouldn’t have had otherwise, because we sort of shared this philosophical thing. We would meet all the time, because he would go to the grape days in the Sierra Foothills and I would go and Phyllis van Kriedt, who was another writer who lived in Mill Valley; so the three of us were sort of chums and buddies.

And the other — you looked surprised when I said they didn’t have any wine at the bar — the Healdsburg Chamber of Commerce had a big event, and it was at Villa Chanticleer and everybody went to it. So the first year I was here I went to it, and they have a bar there, and so I’m walking around talking to people and I end up at the bar, and Leo Trentadue was sitting there and said, “Millie, can I buy you a drink?” I

said, "Sure, I'll have a glass of white wine." The bartender said, "We don't have any wine."

So I went and found the president, this is the Healdsburg Chamber, and I just really lit into the guy and said, "You can't do this. Half the people here make wine, and all of them drink it and you don't have any wine at the bar." "Well, we don't run the bar; the American Legion runs the bar." "It doesn't make any difference. You have to have wine." So the next year — I'm sure it got around — the next year I go to this event again and I walk up to the bar and there's Leo and Leo says, "Can I buy you a drink?" I said, "Yes, I'll have a glass of white wine." The guy pulls out a glass and pours a glass of white wine and Leo and I stand there and talk.

I walk out into the lobby area, and Dave Stare from Dry Creek Vineyards was across the room, and Dave had heard my story; he was also nagging to have them do something about this. And when I saw him I raised my glass and I smiled and he yells from across the room, "Yeah, but it's Gallo." [laughter] And at that time Gallo wasn't producing wine up here. They bought tons and tons of grapes up here but they did not have the presence that they have now. This was San Joaquin Valley wine.

Those are my early encounters with the wine community. Leon, I knew virtually up to the day he died. We did a lot of things together. He and Phyllis and I would go and have lunch when he got to where he wasn't writing any more. The incredible thing about Leon was in the early books, not the last one, when people asked me what books they should read or what books they should get and own, I said, "Get the first or second edition, or both, of Leon's books. The third OK, the fourth one don't bother with."

The early editions he visited every winery that's mentioned in that book, every winery. He would fly in and they would pick him up and haul him around. Everywhere. Michigan, Arkansas, everywhere. And that went through the first two editions. By the third edition he was getting older, it wasn't as easy to get around, and there were lots more wineries. So it was pretty much an update. So if you have the second edition you have fundamentally more information than if you have the third one.

The fourth one, by then he was not in terribly good health, and he somehow got hooked with some lady who said that she would type it for him. He typed everything on his little, manual typewriter. She said she'd

type it for him so in the front of the book it gives her credit, and Phyllis just never forgave him for that. “If you couldn’t do it you shouldn’t have done it at all. And you certainly shouldn’t have given this nobody who doesn’t know anything about the wine industry the credit for your fourth edition.”

His first two books are invaluable. I would not give them up for anything. So coming into the industry without any knowledge of wine, the first thing I did was head for a bookstore, and actually the first edition was on a remainder table.

You walk into any bookstore today, what have you got? You’ve got two banks, floor to ceiling, eight feet wide, full of wine books. In those days I think I walked into the bookstore and I walked out with six books, the entire inventory at that time. And I subscribed to all the publications, except Marvin’s. [laughter] I ran into Shanken at Catelli’s one night, he was with one party and I was with another, and I went over and I said, “I don’t want to interrupt, I want to introduce myself. I’m Millie Howie, I work with Geyser Peak Winery.” and I asked him something and he said, “Well, that’s in my magazine.” Not his *Wine Spectator* but the other wine one which gives wine statistics. I said, “Well, I can’t afford that.” And he said, “You should.” That was the end of the conversation right there. He and I tangled a couple of times.

FIRST “CALIFORNIA WINE EXPERIENCE”

HICKE: We’re now up to your participation with the first “California Wine Experience.”

HOWIE: Yes, I had a lot of firsts, but that was fun because I worked with the Golden Gate Restaurant Association, doing their PR and...

HICKE: This is Shanken’s Wine Experience now?

HOWIE: Yes, that what we’re seeing now. At one point the director of the Golden Gate Restaurant Association said, “We really need to have some sort of event. You’re involved with wine, so maybe we can do something with wine.” So we drafted the “California Wine Experience.” We sent out the invitations for the people to come and be part of it. We got with the hotel — the Swig family was absolutely marvelous in helping us put it together and making it absolutely top drawer. We got I don’t know how many wineries; I’ve got the program. We did seminars, we did four or five

seminars, and it really was a neat event and very successful from the point of view of the wineries and the restaurant association. Financially it was a total disaster. It lost something like \$30,000, something like that.

Immediately the board of directors said that they were never going to do it again. What I didn't find out until years later was that they turned around and sold the "California Wine Experience" to Marvin Shanken for \$1. Maybe I heard wrong, but I've heard it over the years. But I've always kept my background material from that, because I figure some day somebody is going to say, "Well, when did Shanken start the Wine Experience?" And I would be able to say, "Well, it started out in San Francisco with the Golden Gate Restaurant Association and I was involved." I'm old enough now that I've become a little protective of some of the things I was involved with, and I don't want somebody else coming along and saying "I did that." Not without my saying, "No you didn't."

HICKE: They no longer even have it in San Francisco.

HOWIE: Right, but he is absolutely a genius. He took it farther than we could, and it always would have been a San Francisco event. And maybe at some point the wineries would have got bored, like the Monterey Wine Festival, which started out gang busters and then it got to a certain point and then it peaked. In the early days it was, "We've got to be invited to be part of that." Then it became, "Well, we did it last year and we poured a lot of wine and..." It became less important. And the other thing that happens is that the people you really want to reach as a winery no longer participate because they get busy, they've grown to a point where they can't do everything and they start saying no. "We'll do the Monterey Wine Festival every other year or we'll do the "California Wine Experience" every other year." So things come in waves, and I think for the event itself, Marvin took it and ran with it and did good things with it. But I just don't want him saying that he invented it.

HICKE: Did you ever do an article on that?

HOWIE: Oh, no. Heavens no. I don't do that sort of thing. I don't think I've ever done an article where — I get on my soap box about things in the industry that upset me, but not something personal. I don't often feel that I've been wronged by anybody. And I don't feel I was wronged by Marvin. Marvin is a businessman. Marvin made a wonderful business deal. I just don't want him to take that one step further and say, "I did it." Because he took something that already existed and improved on it.

In a column, because it's your opinion, you're allowed to say anything you want to. I don't think that gives you the right to vent your spleen whenever you wake up in the morning and have a bad day. To my memory I've only written one column in the entire time I have been writing that zinged a wine, that said that this was really a bad wine. And then I didn't say whose it was. I just simply reported that I had received shipment of wine and a fellow writer asked me if I had opened it yet. And I said, "No I haven't." And he said, "It's terrible." I said in a column that when somebody says something like that, the first thing you do is go home and open a bottle. And it was true.

Because the wine industry has progressed so rapidly and quality has become sort of the hallmark I think, it was just that I was surprised that it was still possible to find a bottle of bad wine. I remember the first time Leon and I went out to dinner; it was at a little winery in Forestville with a darling young winemaker. Leon had been invited to come and meet them, taste their wines and have dinner, and so he said, "Come with me." We went to dinner and they poured us a glass of wine and Leo took one sip and said, "Oh dear." And I said, "What's the matter?" He said, "They've got bad cooperage." Of course the young man kept coming over and asking, "Have you tasted it, what do you think of it?" And you know, Leon doesn't want to say you've got bad cooperage. But the kid was so persistent that he said, "I think you have something wrong with your cooperage and I think it is giving an off taste to your wine."

HICKE: Well, that was helpful in the long run.

HOWIE: Yes, but you could see him battling not to say this, but the kid was so young and so enthusiastic and he was so pleased that he was a winemaker. Poor thing.

PHILOSOPHY OF WRITING

HICKE: You were just talking about your writing. Can you tell me about your writing habits? Do you write all day long, or do you have a limit of so many hours a day, or do you write until it's finished?

HOWIE: Yes, write 'till it's finished. [laughter] It varies. Almost everything I write these days is to a word count. I know how many words I have when I start out. What I do is I write the whole thing, and then I go back and chop it. I always ask editors to call me if it needs further editing, because I've had some really funny edits happen where they take out

something and then I refer to it later. I've got great editors; everybody I work with is just great.

I'm not a deadline writer. I don't wait until the day before it's due then write it. Yes, sometimes, but I try not to. I try to give myself some air in case there is something that needs to be changed or I've bobbled it somehow. A certain number of pages a day or anything like that, no. Because it will vary: like right now I'm in a little hiatus. My column appears alternate weeks, and I do an events column for *Wine Country This Week*, which is a weekly publication, but everything except the main story stays the same for two weeks. So that makes it an alternate week. So the week that I have to write the events column I don't have to write my Healdsburg column. I know that every week I have one thing that I have to write. Then one of the publications I write for is semiannual.

HICKE: What is the name of it?

HOWIE: *Steppin' Out*. So I get a gang of things that have to be done for the winter-spring issue, and then nothing for several months, then there's another gang of stuff that I have to do for the summer-fall issue. I guess everything else I write somebody says, "I'd like to have it by 'X' date." And several of my editors — oh, and I write every year a story for the harvest issue of the *Healdsburg Tribune*. I ask Barry Duggan, my editor, "When is it due, when is the story due?" He says, "Well, November such and such. I don't have to worry about you, you always get it in before the deadline." So that's sort of nice, to know that people think I am reliable.

HICKE: It's even better for them!

HOWIE: I guess.

V. SONOMA COUNTY WINE LIBRARY

BOOK DONATIONS

HICKE: Should we talk about MFK Fisher?

HOWIE: MFK Fisher I met when we were most actively involved in creating the Wine Library. I guess she and I had grown up pretty much in the same era, because we hit it off like people do who have similar points of contact. The first time I remember being anywhere with her was when they dedicated the new St. Helena City Library, which has the Napa Wine Library in it. I was there and she was one of the speakers and James Beard, not the food man but the one who was so active in creating the wine library in Napa, were speakers. I don't recall that I went there with her but I met her there. I think that was my first meeting with her.

[End Tape 4, Side A]

[Begin Tape 4, Side B]

HOWIE: Because we liked each other and because we had these points of reference, she invited me to come over and have lunch with her. And we did that several times. She of course was vastly interested in our wine library, and by that time the Napa Library was beginning to run out of space. She was getting editor's copies of books, so she would just put a carton in the corner of the room and when these books came, after she had looked at them and reviewed them, if she was supposed to review them, she put them in the box, and when the box got full she'd phone me and she'd say, "Come to lunch, I've got some more books for you." I would go over and have lunch and chat and visit and then I would take my books and go home.

Clayla Davis was the head librarian at St. Helena, and she was getting us their duplicates, because of course everybody was donating them to them. Then Davis [University of California-Davis] was giving us some duplicates as well. So we were quite fortunate in that we had these

sources, plus a lot of wine writers who also get review copies of books would run out of space. Like Hank Rubin. He takes all these wonderful magazines and he gets review-copy books, and I'll get a call from him saying, "I've got another load of books for you." When he says a load of books, I mean it would fill up the trunk of a car. He lives in San Francisco, and I drive down, and he has the doorman come and load the books in my car. Then we visit, and sometimes we have lunch, and I drive home and give the books to Bo. They'd either go in the library or they would be sold as secondhand books at the Odyssey or something of that sort.

So we still have those people who think of us first. People like Leon and Phyllis and Margot Patterson Doss already had promised their libraries or their writings to somebody else. So a lot of them we didn't get. They got mine. When I moved from Alexander Valley into Healdsburg, I moved from a house with a full basement into a little house which had 952 square feet. I packed all my files into boxes; I had 26 boxes, and hauled them off to the library.

HICKE: And I've used them extensively.

HOWIE: It's sort of fun to see them all in the file drawers. One thing I did do, I don't understand why I did it because I'm always — you know, part of the reason we started some of the things we started was because of Isabel Simi Haigh; she dies, and her nephew or someone who was involved with the estate just saw all these boxes she had accumulated over the years as junk. And they got dumped. And my litany was, "We must not let this happen." I would say, "Call me if you see something like this, call me." I wasn't as good as Bill Heintz was. Bill would take everything. He took bills of lading. I took him a box from Geyser Peak which I didn't realize had mice in it. [laughter] They had made little nests inside the box. [more laughter] So he threw the mice out, but salvaged some of the stuff.

But anyway, when I moved I had a complete file of all the "Wine Words" columns that I had written from 1970, whatever. So I put them in the fireplace and burned them up. And I look back at that now and wonder what I was thinking of.

HICKE: Well, let's go back to the beginning of the Wine Library. We haven't gotten that story yet. How did the idea appear?

STARTING THE RISSIAN RIVER WINE ROAD

HOWIE: The germ of the idea was included in the ideas of the Wine Road.

HICKE: Ah, the *Wine Road*. We haven't discussed that either.

HOWIE: I did look in some of the files, and it seems that along about 1976 there was enough pizzazz in the wine industry. It was coming back to life. A lot of people had money and they needed tax shelters. "Oh, we'll buy a little winery and make a little wine." And people like Schlitz were buying and running wineries, and so it was here to stay obviously. It seemed to me and George Vare, for whom I was working at the time, that the history of all this needed to be protected. And so when we came out with the idea of the Wine Road; it was to promote — everything I wrote about the Wine Road in the early days was, "Everybody knows where Napa is, nobody knows where Sonoma is, and if you say Healdsburg, or Windsor, or Cloverdale they have even less idea." So the idea was there are enough wineries clustered around Healdsburg that if we could get them all to work in harmony and promote the area, rather than saying, "Oh no, I only want to talk about Geyser Peak wine," or, "Oh no, I only want to talk about Chateau Souverain wine," if we could get them to be more cohesive, this would be great, and that was when we came up with the idea of the Russian River Wine Road.

It was really just an idea for a long, long time. Then starting in 1971, the city of Healdsburg had been having a May Fest in the plaza. Every May they would have this big event, and by 1974, '75 there were a fair number of wineries. They had invited the wineries to come and pour their wine at the Fest. So this went on every year. It was good exposure for the wineries, but they were donating their wine. Every ounce of wine that they poured was a donation. By 1976 Ell Henry was the executive director of the Healdsburg Chamber of Commerce, and Ell was an old PR man from the American Broadcasting Company. He had been working in Chicago at the time I was working in San Francisco, so we sort of knew each other. I admired his pizzazz and his smartness. He called the wineries and asked them if they would please come to a meeting after the Fest. He said, "We, the city of Healdsburg, have benefited from this and we feel it's time to give something back to the wineries."

Tom Johnson from Johnson Winery said, "I guess this is the right time to mention Millie's idea for the Wine Road." So we explained the Wine

Road concept to Ell.” It varies. I noticed in the writing I’ve done that sometimes I said that there were seven wineries; sometimes I said there were nine. I think there were nine at this meeting, He said, “Why don’t you come back later today? We’ll meet again and I’ll tell you what we can do.” So he, I guess, talked to the Geyserville chamber, and the Geyserville chamber said, “Sure, we’ll support it.” I don’t know to what extent the amount of money each one gave, even if it was money. I’m not sure. Anyway that was May.

In August I gathered together the wineries. We met at Catelli’s, The Rex when Rich Catelli owned it. He was very enthusiastic about the Road. We had a map drawn by Sherry Licu, whom I mentioned before, and had a few thousand maps printed and started handing them out to people. And they went out real fast. To my knowledge Catelli’s was the only restaurant that was ever a member of the Wine Road from its inception ‘till today. There are no restaurants now. Every year there were more wineries and every year the map was a little bigger, and now of course the map unfolds into a huge thing. The great thing about the map is that about five years ago they had it re-drawn to scale. If you are looking at that map, you know the distance between Canyon Road and Geyser Peak.

HICKE: That’s helpful if you’re driving around...

HOWIE: Yes. And I would have to check the actual figure, but fairly recently they printed 300,000 copies. They all are distributed free. They have never charged for it. It is the best map going of the area. It’s strayed from the hide-bound rules it started with. The initial rule was that you could be on the map if you were open to the public and if you were within walking distance of the Russian River. Well, obviously Paradise Ridge is not within walking distance of the Russian River and a lot of the wineries aren’t. But still it’s one of the liveliest organizations of any sort that I’ve ever been involved with, because when they have their general meeting, they will have 40-50 people show up. And maybe that doesn’t sound like a lot out of 100 wineries and 20 some odd inns, but that’s a higher percentage than Kiwanis, I think.

IDEAS FOR THE WINE LIBRARY

HOWIE: So part of the concept of the Wine Road — one of the things we said was that there should be — I think we said a museum. But then we also

said there should be a repository for written materials, for paper. You know, this says library whether you say library or not.

So that was the idea for the Wine Library, and it sat quietly until the word was out that the last new library in Sonoma County to be built, or about to be, on the drawing boards, was Healdsburg. I had always — you know, I get these bulldog things where I grab something and will not let go no matter what, and one of my tenacious things was that the Wine Library had to be part of the library system.

Everybody that built a new development came to the winegrowers and said, “We’ve got the perfect spot. We’ll give you a little storefront right here next to Macy’s.” Well, no, the Wine Library does not belong next to Macy’s in a mall. It belongs as part of the library system. So when we heard about the Healdsburg Library — again, somebody said, “It’s time to think about your other idea.” So I called David Sabsay, and I said, “I want to take you to lunch and talk to you about an idea I have.”

HICKE: His position at the time was what?

HOWIE: He was the executive director of the Sonoma County Library System. David is from Boston and he has that Boston reserve. When we met, you could almost feel this “I’m being polite. I’ve never had a woman take me to lunch before, and I’m a little embarrassed by it and you said you wanted to talk to me about something.” You could just feel this thing. So we sit down and we order and we were chatting and so I said, “This is what I’m thinking. And it has to be part of the library system.” The more I talked, the more he unbent. Basically he’s nodding and smiling.

From that point on he was absolutely the staunchest supporter the library has or ever will have. David is so thorough and has such a retentive memory that he knew all these sources. He could make libraries in Sonoma County happen because he knew what grants there were, where there would be shared financial responsibility. So it would make these things possible, because always the big bump there is financial support. And he would help ease that. So he’s our supporter, and it was a long process.

We joined forces then with the people who were pushing for a new library in Healdsburg and didn’t care about wine. In fact, one man was adamantly against the Wine Library. He thought it was a place where they served wine and people got drunk. “No, no, no, library, books, paper.” [laughter]

HICKE: When you say we, who is or are we?

HOWIE: We were a motley group. There were winery people. They were mostly people who had been active on the Wine Road. Judy Gollan, who I think was at Chateau Souverain at that time. Roger Bowlin. Mostly they were hospitality people. Roger was at Asti. But anyway they were mostly Wine Road people and mostly hospitality managers, so they met the public and they knew what the public was asking, and they could see how valuable this could be to educate the public.

HICKE: Did you gather up this group?

HOWIE: We were all just sort of involved. It was probably like we would be at a Wine Road meeting and we'd say, "Why don't we all get together at Millie's house and she'll cook breakfast for us?" [laughter] So it became a series of breakfast meetings, and that was when Ruth Teiser came. She came to one of the breakfasts and she gave us all the instructions on how to do a proper oral history. I wrote it out, then she went over it, and corrected it. I don't think they still use it, which is too bad, because it certainly was the bible for doing oral histories.

HARVEST FAIR

HOWIE: I don't know, it gets all muddled because so much was going on; 1976 was the same year that the Harvest Fair started. The Western Fairs Association, of which most of the county fairs in the state are members, or the State of California, I'm not sure which, but somebody came up and said, "We have all these properties, they're vast properties, acres and acres and they are used once a year, and then they close down. So all you guys out there with fairs have to start coming up with ideas for using those fairgrounds for other activities during the year." Ig Vella was the fair manager at that time, and Ig was the one who came up with the idea of a winter fair, in which the original concept was apples and wine, because that was the harvest. Apples were a big crop and wine was the harvest time. So the first Harvest Fair was in 1976 and I did the publicity the first two years for the fair, and then I worked with a young lady the third year and then somebody else took it over. But it was another one of the firsts you know.

BUILDING THE LIBRARY

HOWIE: So there's all this activity going on and we have this sort of little coalition that keeps showing up at council meetings saying, "We need a new library." And finally we needed to find a site, so there was a little committee headed by Joe Vercelli that went out to investigate the various sites with David Sabsay's criteria; then we got the site and it started growing. From the original drawings, the first plans, the Wine Library was drawn in. I mean it wasn't something that somebody says, "Oh, why don't we stick the Wine Library in?" It was part of the impetus of getting the new library. It was always in the plans and then in 1988 it happened.

HICKE: Are they running out of room now?

HOWIE: Not quite, not quite. The day is coming.

HICKE: Yes, there are more books and more materials.

HOWIE: Yes. There are going to be more electronic materials coming. Of course CDs are easy to store. But then what you've got, though, are all these people, particularly in the local wine industry, who are getting pretty old, and when they go you want their stuff, or before they go we want their stuff for the library. So yes, it's finite. Some day the seams won't stretch and we'll have to... you know, there is a lot on one side of the library that right from the beginning was sort of spoken of as a possible... We could probably expand there if we had to.

HICKE: Yes, I believe there is a little garden in this area.

ACQUIRING MORE MATERIALS AND FUNDRAISING

HOWIE: I was president of the Wine Library Association for seven years, the first seven years of its life, the formative years, because we had to get books. We had bought the vintners' collection long before there was a physical plant.

HICKE: Tell me about that.

HOWIE: Well, we heard that the Vintners' Club in San Francisco was disbanding, and they had this library, I think it was 7,500 books, I'm not sure, and some of them date back to the 17th and 18th century, and they were willing to sell it. So David went down and looked it over. I think they

wanted \$30,000-\$35,000. David went down and looked at it and decided yes, it was worth the price that they were asking.

We had no money. We were people going to meetings talking about building a Wine Library. But we had no money. So David somehow found a way, a temporary way, to buy the collection, and we then paid him back as we did start getting funding. But if it hadn't been for David, we would have never gotten that core library from the Vintners. It also helped, I think, in getting people to join, because we became sort of like a friends of the library association where people could join and then we would have little events. And the major event was one that Henry Trione came up with: "Polo, Wine and all that Jazz."

HICKE: We need to hear about that.

HOWIE: That was our first true fundraiser. It was an annual event and lasted for 11 years. Henry is a big polo man and is one the founders, I guess, of Oakmont where the polo field is. He would get the players, and he would get the field, and he also was a big fan of Turk Murphy, who was a jazz musician from San Francisco. So he would get Turk Murphy to bring his group up to play, and we would put up tents, and we would have wine tasting and cheese. I think the biggest gate was probably about \$10,000, but it was reliable. Even one year it stormed. There was a terrible thunder storm and people were still there. That's the thing. You always say when you have an outdoor event is, "One year it's going to rain and wipe us out." And it does happen, I guess, but they do it back East where it rains all summer, so it's not that threatening. So Henry then was our big supporter, and he saw that we had the players. Then I think he got pressured to stop donating the field. Then it began to get too expensive for us to do, because we bought glasses that had the polo logo on it and did other things.

HICKE: What were some other sources of funds for the Wine Library?

HOWIE: Randy Arnold and his parents came up with the idea of appellation tours. The idea was that a little bus or two vans — people would sign up to go and they would go visit three, originally it was three ranches, three vineyards, all growers. The idea was that nobody ever got to go to these places. That made it attractive. I think it was \$35 and maybe they could take 20 people, something like that. It wasn't a big fundraiser but again, I think originally they did it twice a year, and it's still going on and they have a waiting list. They always have a waiting list for people who

couldn't get on. People don't care where they're going. They just want to go. And they're good tours.

But now they also go to wineries as well as vineyards. And there are more groups that are doing vineyard tours than there used to be. "Grape to Glass" does it. Dry Creek does it, Alexander Valley does it, so it's not as tempting as it was, but it's still a day in the country, going to wineries, getting special treatment and it's relaxing, so you're not worn out. It's still a good little event

HICKE: There seems to be a lot more interest in the vineyards now.

HOWIE: Well, because they keep saying that wine is made in the vineyard. And *terroir* has become the big watch word.

They now have the Odyssey, and the first one we had — it wasn't called Odyssey, I forget what it was called. We had pretty much followed the standard format, music and food and wine tasting, and the first one we invited a lot of authors, Gaye Le Baron was there and several authors were there signing their books. Nobody wanted them to sign their books so that wasn't a great idea. [laughter] But anyway, we did that.

Then the idea for a wine auction came up. This I believe was Roger Bowlin's idea. Roger was a member of the Kiwanis. The Kiwanis have to take on projects, and the Kiwanians got swept up in this idea, and they did all the work. They collected the wines. They got a big cooler truck to keep the wines in. They manned the gate; they did all the treasury work, keeping track of the income, banking it, the whole works. The wineries would donate mostly wine originally. I don't think it was events as much as it is now. The first one was held up at Asti; Forrest Tancer, from Iron Horse, was the auctioneer.

[End Tape 4, Side B]

[Begin Tape 5, Side A]

HOWIE: If there were any expenses they were taken care of, and all of the profit went to the Wine Library. It grew and got to be bigger and it moved to Sonoma Mission Inn, and those were the best, I think. Those were wonderful because we had hay bales and people would come and cook sausages and hand out cookies, and so we were showcasing not just the wines but also some of the other thing that go on in Sonoma County. And the auction made a fair amount of money, and it helped support the Wine Library. The Sonoma Winegrowers helped in putting it on and

manning it and everything. Then they got a president one year who decided that the Wine Library wasn't classy enough and it was too confining.

HICKE: Was he from the Kiwanis?

HOWIE: No. The Kiwanis were the ones who came up with the, "If it rains, we're wiped out!" So they had bowed out. It got bigger too. It got beyond Healdsburg, so it couldn't be a Healdsburg Kiwanis project. It was beyond them. The Sonoma County Winegrowers were prime movers in it and they would meet and they would do a lot of the sending out, and the soliciting, and the program and all those things. Then they decided they needed something of a little broader scope. They took the funding and distributed it to hospitals and things like that. The Wine Library — the first year that they changed the routine we got I think \$10,000, and that was the last contribution. Then we had to come up with some other things and "Polo, Wine and all that Jazz" was gone. That was when we came up with Odyssey, which has been a very good fundraiser.

HICKE: Tell me about Odyssey.

HOWIE: I don't know a great deal about Odyssey. This is beyond my time. I did the first seven years and then I was emeritus for several years, then something went wrong and they said, "Will you come back?" Walt Dieden, the grower in Dry Creek, said, "If you'll come back and be president for one year, I'll be your vice-president and then I'll do it the next year." Well, when the next year came, "Oh, I'm too busy, I can't do it." So I think I was president again for two years and then I said, "That's it. You find somebody or you don't find somebody." You know, you can't keep going back to mother.

WINE LIBRARY ASSOCIATES

HICKE: Let's go to the formation of the Wine Library Associates.

HOWIE: Those things evolved right along almost with the planning stages, because the main thing you want is to get your 501c, I'm not sure of the number, which means you are a nonprofit and you don't have to pay sales tax, you don't have to do any of these things, and you can get money as long as you spend it for your cause. So we incorporated the Wine Road very early. Probably by the end of the first year we had our rating and everything was OK.

Pretty much the same thing happened with the Wine Library. I think David kept us on track there. David Sabsay, "We're going to play by the rules. This is what you're supposed to do and you're going to do it." So we got our incorporation and our rating. I think, I'm not sure, the Wine Road or the library but I think the Wine Road has lost that, because they did something one year. They earned too much money. You know how the government says, "That's too much. You can't have that."

So the associates came about because we were going to build this library, and you need more people, and you need some money, and so you start the Wine Library Associates.

HICKE: You started it?

HOWIE: No, not really. You get this little clump of people and they see the same thing. So it happens. It's a case of — this one will say, "Well, heck, my winery will help pay for the glasses or whatever." And somebody else says, "Oh yes, we can do that," or, "Oh yes, we'll print the programs." It's young and it's new, it's relatively small, so everybody is trying to think of how they can help. It all just happens. I think it happens with all organizations which are nonprofit. I think they start with four or five people, and pretty soon it's the American Red Cross all over the world. We're not quite there yet.

HICKE: Did you have some ceremony when the library opened in 1988?

HOWIE: Yes, a ceremony. They had a couple of speakers, but it was a general opening of the whole library and we were just part of it. But a lot of the people who were members of the Wine Library Association, or whatever it was called then, came. They had to see their library. So that was exciting. And we saw a lot of support. There are four or five people who either are or used to be on the board of the Napa Library, and they got very interested. They would come over regularly. They would bring themselves and other people over to take a tour of the library, and they'd visit with Bo, take us to lunch.

HICKE: Librarians or wine people?

HOWIE: No, just people who supported the Napa Valley Wine Library and who were instrumental in getting it going, or their board. Because the odd thing is that the boards of the wine libraries have never had a preponderance of wine people on them. They're almost always people from some other field. John Hutchinson and Ted Stier were early

presidents, and John Hutchinson did the marvelous history of it, the chronological history of the Wine Library which is in the Wine Library. They were from back East and I think they were academics. And no wine.

They liked wine. They drank wine. Ted eventually worked for Gloria Ferrer in the hospitality department, and that's pretty much the caliber of people. They were business people, or they had retired up here and they were at loose ends. We would attract a winemaker, and then he would get into his busy season and he couldn't come to the meetings. So it pretty much relies on people who are not really deeply into the industry. Bob Bennett, who formed Genco, a home winemakers group, a really great group, he's been on the board for a long time; I think he was even an officer.

I've always worked in industries where you were part of a big crowd. I worked for the California Library Association when I worked in the library field. So that part of my life is where the only people who knew me were library people. I've got all this bunch of people who only know me as a wine person. So I sort of have all these funny little sections of my life where I have lots of people whose names I'm trying to remember and can't.

HICKE: We'll get it later.

HOWIE: That's one thing about keeping my own files and keeping tabs on things. Anything I've said where I can't remember, I know where to go to put my hand on it.

SONOMA COUNTY LIBRARY COMMISSIONER

HICKE: Ok, you were a Library Commissioner for...

HOWIE: Six years.

HICKE: How did that evolve?

HOWIE: Well, I would join things where I thought the wine industry was under-represented. I think I mentioned I was on the County Alcoholism Board. That's probably not the name of it. When I first came into the industry, one of the things everybody, and I mean everybody, said was, "You can't get drunk on wine." Well, as a San Franciscan I said, "What are

these people down on Sixth Street, Sixth and Howard, drinking if you can't get drunk on wine?" Every time I'd find something where I thought we should have a wine participation, I would try to get somebody interested and usually couldn't. And the Alcoholism Board was one of those. I thought that wineries needed to be part of that to show that they were concerned, that they knew their product had alcohol in it and they were concerned. Well, "No."

HICKE: Still not?

HOWIE: As far as I know. I'm not sure the board still exists. It has to. And I forget how many years I was on it. I was probably one of two members who was not a recovering alcoholic, or did not own a facility working with recovering alcoholics. I was sort of odd man out. The same thing happened when I found out about Farm Trails, which was very young at that time. I said, "The wineries need to have a presence on that." There were no wineries who were members of the Farm Trails in those days. So I went to George Vare and said, "Somebody has to go and be part of the Farm Trails." So he said, "Go, enjoy." [laughter] So I did, and I had a wonderful time. Great people and wonderful food. They had their meetings and they had a potluck, and I was always the first one who said, "Could I have the recipe?" [laughter] So yes, I was involved in everything. If it existed I figured it was part of my necessary education and I would go do it.

HICKE: The Library Commission?

HOWIE: The Library Commission. I think I was on the Advisory Board first, except that I liked libraries and I had worked with libraries for many years and my daughter is a librarian, was a librarian. I probably volunteered to be on the Advisory Board. They said they needed another member and I said, "Sure." So I was on the Healdsburg Advisory Board, and then there was a vacancy in the Fourth District for the representative on the commission. By then I was all wrapped in the progress of the library and the Wine Library, I guess, so I told Nick Esposti that I would like to be considered for the vacancy. So he appointed me, and it was a four-year term. When it was time for me to re-appointed, I think Paul Kelly had then become Fourth District Supervisor. I told Nick, "Tell him that I want to stay on." He said, "I will, I will." He told Paul that I was still interested, and I made an appointment and went down and talked to Paul and said, "I want to stay on please." So then I stayed on, and then two years after that I moved to

Rohnert Park and was out of the Fourth District so I was off the commission.

HICKE: What were your responsibilities on the commission?

HOWIE: Well, you represent your district. I had three libraries in the Fourth District. I had Healdsburg and Cloverdale and at that time there was a store front library in Geyserville, and then later they built or they renovated a property for the library in Windsor. So for a while I had three, and so we were expected to go to the Advisory Board meetings at each of the libraries in our venue and report to them on what was happening in the whole system and get from them any ideas or complaints or wishes. That was fun because I got to see areas where I had never been before. And we did get the Windsor one in. It wasn't quite as acrimonious as getting the Healdsburg one in. But you have to convince; you have to go before the council and you have to convince that a library is an important part of the city, and that yes, people are going to use it and yes, the library system is going to pay. All we want from you is the building, and so it was great. But when I moved to Rohnert Park, they already had a very good representative, and I don't think I'd get involved in it again anyway. For one thing it means night driving, meetings are at night. And I don't want to drive to Santa Rosa. I don't want to drive to Santa Rosa anytime. I certainly don't want to drive in the dark on a winter's night.

HICKE: Did that new extra lane make it easier?

HOWIE: It makes it worse. That merge at Baker, every day it seems there's an accident there. That's it. That's as far as it goes.

HICKE: It's only on the south side of town?

HOWIE: No, it's from Baker to Wilfred. Wilfred is the exit right here after Expressway, so it's from there to where you see the fairgrounds exit, which is Baker. You have these terrible merges where you're driving along here, then here comes the exit from College and suddenly you realize that you have to go off at downtown and so he's coming this way and you're going that way...miserable. It was another one of those things that was approved and ready to go, but it didn't happen for years.

SUNSET AND OTHER MAGAZINES

HICKE: I have down here *Sunset Magazine*.

HOWIE: Well, *Sunset* was one of the plums that all PR people wanted. They did luncheons for influential people. It could be a group of chefs or a group of store owners or someone their magazine appealed to. Margaret Smith was in charge of hospitality there, and they had a very nice wine cellar, little, but very nice. You always wanted to get your wines shown at one of these luncheons, because these were people who either knew wine or were open to knowing about wine, and so that was one of the prime people you tried to influence.

HICKE: For public relations?

HOWIE: For public relations, that was one of the ones you always went after.

HICKE: I wasn't sure what the connection was there.

HOWIE: I can't see any other. Margaret and I are still friends. She retired from *Sunset* a long time ago and has her own publishing company now. She does wine cook books mostly. So we still are friends. We were in the industry from about the same period. People were always mistaking us for each other. She's lighter. She weighs less than I do, she's more slender, but she had short, grey hair and she's sort of perky and we sort of always dress alike, you know, skirt and sweater, skirt and blouse, the old business outfit, suits. Still to this day someone will come up to me and "Oh, Margaret, I haven't seen you in so long." [laughter] But it's nice. If you're going to be confused with someone, it's nice to be confused with a nice person. And she is a nice person. Well her husband — I showed you the picture of Barengo and Four Monks Wine Vinegar getting married. The officiating minister was her husband, Roger Smith.

One of the clients I had way back when you asked me about clients was the Four Monks, and I stayed with them — I was still doing their PR when Nakano [Foods] bought them so I worked for Nakano for a while too. But that was a fun client, because we did all sorts of fun things. We did vinegar tastings, which are actually done, there's a routine. Dan, the pixie, Bagnani was the one who said this is how you do it, telling jokes all the way. Everybody was happy. I have pictures of that. I don't know where they are because I sectioned them out one day, I was going to send them to the people who were in them. One of the plants was in

Cucamonga, one of the vinegar plants, so we went down there and did the tasting for food editors down there and developed recipes with vinegar. We did a meat ball recipe with a sauce that was wonderful.

HICKE: What do you look for when you taste vinegar?

HOWIE: The acidity, the flavor, that's there's nothing off, that it doesn't taste peculiar.

HICKE: You dip...

HOWIE: You dip a sugar cube in it. It has to be one of those crystal sugar cubes like the Russians put between their teeth and drink their tea through. A regular sugar cube has something else in it to make it dissolve faster, soda or something. But these others don't. They're pure sugar. And they're longer, and so you take them, dip them in the vinegar, and you suck the vinegar. The sugar is diluting any sharpness, and if you're tasting one made out of sherry and one made out of Champagne, it isn't just vinegar. It isn't just sour. It isn't just something you put on a salad, it's a distinctive flavor. That was fun too.

I've always had great accounts; I've always worked on great things. For a while there I was really blessed, because I worked on what were definitely top-drawer accounts. I had Ernie's Restaurant, which at that time was definitely the top restaurant in San Francisco, and I did Paramount Pictures, and I did the Ice Capades; part of it was when I was on my own and part of it was when I was with the agency. I started working with Ernie's when I was with the agency, and then after I left they stayed a client for a good number of years. That was fun. It was sad to see them close

HICKE: Have you ever done olive oil?

HOWIE: No. Dan showed me what to do. You put it on your hands, rub your hands together and then sniff. That's about as much involvement with olive oil that I've had. I haven't really written about olive oil either. A lot of the wineries now have groves, and I've written about the groves in connection with the wineries.

HICKE: Are there other publications like *Sunset* that you've really needed to get hold of when you were promoting something?

HOWIE: Well, any glossy magazine was a goal.

HICKE: Any travel magazines?

HOWIE: Yes, *Condé Nast* was always a big one. Some of them had started carrying wine items; some of them had started a regular, little column or half a column on wine. What you were after was a high circulation and top magazines from circulation, looks and readership and quotability. But yes, magazines were always a bigger goal than the newspapers, because the newspapers were easier to get into. A lot of them did have their own wine people, and so it was a matter of getting these wine people.

For a while I did the PR for the city of Healdsburg. That was when I was more involved with the travel writers, people like that. But it was the writers you went after, because a lot of them wrote for several publications, and so if you could keep pitching an idea or various ideas at someone until they caught one, that was the whole trick. Again it was the persistence I learned from my salesmanship class.

HICKE: Gerald Asher, is he...

HOWIE: Gerald is so adorable. He is a strong supporter of the Wine Library. He has done a couple of "Evenings with Gerald Asher," and he is extremely kind and extremely knowledgeable and one of the best wine writers around, best writers around. It doesn't matter if it's just wine or not, he is just a sensational writer. But he really, really likes the Wine Library, and I think he's visited it other times when he wasn't on the program. Just came in to look up something or happened to be around.

HICKE: Does he live up here?

HOWIE: No, he lives in San Francisco. Well, he lives in San Francisco and France. I think he's part-time San Francisco and part-time France. But yes, Gerald is a real dear. I like him.

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT THE WINE INDUSTRY

HICKE: I have several over-all topics to ask you about. You talked about elitism that is here in California now.

HOWIE: [laughter] I even found an article which I think I wrote in 1970, something that was headlined "California: the New France" It was a long time ago.

HICKE: You were way ahead of the times.

HOWIE: And the thing that I lament because I am so curious — if I am going to think about wine I'm going to think about wine in 50 states, where it is now, I understand. I lost count where there were a couple of states that didn't have at least one winery. But all 50 have at least one winery. And I'm curious about the other 49. I know about California and I'm proud of California, I think it's great. But I think it's wrong that everybody thinks they have to make Chardonnay and Cabernet.

You go to Maryland, you go to Virginia, you go to Michigan, and these perfectly great winemakers and vineyardists are trying to grow and trying to make wine. I admit that one of the best Cabernets I ever tasted was from Virginia. I think that's more of a fluke than anything else, but there are a lot of grapes out there. I was back in Maryland and I had this wonderful Chambourcin, and the Californians look at you, "Huh, what's a Chambourcin?" It could be a bird; it could be a dish of pasta. It's a gorgeous red wine, gorgeous. It's a delightful red wine. But it's a French-American hybrid, and it grows great. It grows and throws out bunches and bunches and they make wine, and the one that I have talked about with people won the Governor's Cup.

These states back there — not all of them — I know that Virginia and Maryland have a thing called the Governor's Cup. It's a wine judging, but it's really something to take the Governor's Cup. I was back there and this winery had taken the Governor's Cup for the Chambourcin, and we went out, my daughter was with me, she was living back there then, and we went and visited his winery.

A lot of states subsidize their wine industry, which California doesn't. A lot of them have much less rigid laws. There are wineries that have golf courses, there are wineries that have landing fields, there are wineries that have all sorts of entertainment things that we don't, that we are not, for the most part, allowed to have by law. And far more wineries across the country have restaurants connected to them, and do annual events like the Passport Day in Dry Creek. In a lot of the states, because they don't have 500 or a thousand wineries, the whole state participates; the states are smaller. But all the wineries in the state participate; you visit them and they give you a cork screw or T shirt or something. I think the fun — the nice things I was involved in the early days, the '70s and early '80s, you see now in other states, but you don't see it as much here. And I think one of the things that changed it was the Napa Valley Wine Auction. I think that it got so grand and is attracting these big

names, so that instead of people saying, "That's what they do but this is what we do," a lot of people push for Sonoma County to be Napa.

[End Tape 5, Side A]

[Begin Tape 5, Side B]

HICKE: I would say that I think you have done a lot to put Sonoma County on the map.

HOWIE: Words.

HICKE: Yes, words are clearly crucial. So anyway, you didn't finish with the elitism of the California.

HOWIE: When Californians first started, the French were looking down their noses, "Oh, California, what are they doing over there? They're not making the wine." And California accepted this for a while. "Well, we're not quite as good as the First Growth." Then they had the Stephen Spurrier tasting and California ranked.

HICKE: 1976.

HOWIE: Yes, '76 seems to be the pivotal year. It gave California a lot of confidence, but they still deferred to France. Even now a lot of the winemakers, if you ask them what their favorite wine is, it would be one of the chateaus in France. It wouldn't be Louis Martini's Sonoma, which is a marvelous wine. But mostly California now sees itself as being on the pinnacle, I think. So if you are talking about wine in Michigan, they are not listening. They don't hear you say that they make wine in Michigan. They don't know that there is a wine, or they don't care that there is a wine called Seyval Blanc, which is every bit as nice as a Sauvignon Blanc or Viognier. It took a long time for them to get into Rhône varieties from the Bordeaux. So it was "The only real wines are the Bordeaux wines." Now, you know, the only real wines are California wines. I don't think it's dangerous, and I don't think it's making people dislike us. I mean, "I'm not going to drink their wine because they're so snobby."

I'm a big advocate for screw tops because I think that's where we're finally going to kill the snobbishness, when people don't come with their little tastevins and fancy cork screws and their foil cutters and open a bottle of wine with great ceremony, hand you the cork and you don't know what to do with it. [laughter]

HICKE: You talked about the role the wineries should have in controlling alcohol.

HOWIE: Yes that sort of tied in with my being on the Alcohol Board.

HICKE: Millie, could you talk about your wine judging experiences?

HOWIE: Most wine writers are invited to judge at various competitions. Most of them like to judge at the major competitions —Riverside, Sacramento State Fair, and the like. I guess you'd lump Sonoma County Harvest Fair in there, too. I have judged at a couple of big events, but my idea of tasting 86 Chardonnays in one day is not my idea of a good time. I love to judge at county fairs. I've judged at the Cloverdale Citrus Fair since it started, about 19 years, but now it is a major competition sponsored by the San Francisco *Chronicle* and not nearly as much fun. With my love of the Mother Lode, I really enjoy El Dorado, where I have judged for years, ever since the Fair inaugurated a judging, and Calaveras and Amador counties. I judge at the Geyserville Color Tour every year and at the Zin Taste-Off in Dry Creek Valley and the Marin Home Winemakers competition. Those include or are restricted to home winemakers, and it's been interesting to follow the improvement in quality over the years.

VI. PERSONAL OVERVIEW

HICKE: I know you have helped many other people. You were the one of the first, if not the first in public relations, and you've helped other people in the industry.

HOWIE: I can't talk to that, because I think that since I was a little girl, if somebody asked me something and I could answer it and help them, I did. It's not anything I do consciously. If the phone rings, I pick it up. "Hi, you don't know me, my name is Betty Smith, and my old friend Doug Jones suggested I call you because I've just quit my job in Silicon Valley and I've always liked wine and I thought I would like to be a winery PR, and he said you could help me."

HICKE: What do you do?

HOWIE: I tell them, "Well, I suggest you do this, and this, and this. I suggest you bone up on it so that you know..." I answer truthfully. I try to be encouraging without saying, "Yeah, yeah, do it." I just think that I have always, all my life just — somebody said, "What do I do about this?" I have tried to sit and think and, "Well, have you tried that?" Or, "Why don't you try that?" But I think it's just part of me, I know it's not conscience. I know that if somebody said, "Teach a class." "No!" Yes, I would do the book, but then that's writing, see, I'm not out there.

But you know, I consider myself a loner; I prefer to do things alone. I prefer not to be in big crowds. I use the excuse that all the time that I was in PR and putting on events, I was handling big crowds and I was making sure that everything went smoothly with that big crowd, but if I am in a big crowd where I have no duties, forget it! Let's go home.

HICKE: Bring your knitting?

HOWIE: I'm the one that if somebody across the room drops a glass, I'm the first one picking up the pieces, because I know it's dangerous and somebody is going to get cut. It's just what I do.

HICKE: OK, tell me about your two books.

HOWIE: Well, the first book — one of the people who was very influential in publishing in San Francisco was Hal Silverman, who was the editor of *California Living*. It was like *Parade* and *USA Weekend*; it was the magazine section for the *Sunday Examiner*. Everybody read it. It was eclectic; it had everything in it; it had articles about real off-beat things. That was one of the primaries; you really wanted to get something in there. Get them to write a beautiful story with some lovely pictures of my winery, my ducks, my whatever.

Hal and I — again, I'll never know. You keep asking me where did you meet him or how did you meet him or where did it start. I don't remember. But anyway, I knew Hal, and we'd have lunch occasionally, and I'd pitch something at him. He did run one story that had nothing to do with wine. It was a very mystical story, but he knew I working in the wine industry and he decided to publish a book called *Pride of the Wineries*. He divided it into three pieces. Harvey Steiman, who was their food editor at that time, was doing one portion. Bob Thompson was doing one portion, and I was to do the third portion. I think my portion was to talk to winemakers and get the winemaker to tell me what his favorite wine was, or something like that. So there were three of us. I guess it sold.

We were paid a flat fee. I have a copy of it and every now and then you run across a copy at the Wine Library sale. Not very often. I don't think it was a big run. And of course the section died and he went to Los Angeles, and so that was an avenue that was closed. The other one is a Sonoma guide book

HICKE: I have 1980 for the first book What about the second book?

HOWIE: The second book was a Sonoma guide book published by the Wine Appreciation Guild. Elliott Mackey, WAG owner, bought a series of guide books published by Vintage Press. They were guide books to various areas, wine areas.

[tape interruption]

HICKE: OK, we were just on the second book.

HOWIE: Yes. The books were published a long time ago, maybe almost 20 years ago. The Napa book was updated somewhere along the line, I think

once, maybe twice. The other one was Sonoma/Mendocino. At that time there were so few wineries that the two counties could be included in one book. I would run into Elliott, and he would say, "I really need to update that Sonoma book; I'd like you to do it if you're interested." So I said, "Sure, give me a call." And nothing would happen.

Years would go by, five years would go by, and I'd run into him at an event and he'd say, "I really need to update that Sonoma book, and I'd like you to do it if you're interested." And again, I'd say, "Sure." And again more time would go by. So a couple of years ago we were at an event and he said the same thing again, and I said the same thing again, and then he called. He said, "Come on over." So I went on over and we talked about if the format was still valid from the previous book, and he gave me the deadline of when I was supposed to have the material all ready. I sent out all the queries to the restaurants and the lodging and the wineries and got them back, corrected, and got the labels and all those things, and then it just sat. I don't know what happened to it; there was some breakdown internally at Wine Appreciation Guild. Anyway, it finally got printed early this year, April I think.

HICKE: It's an informative book. [*Sonoma Wine Tour*, Vintage Image, 2003]

HOWIE: Yes, it doesn't have a very large circulation, which is too bad, and of course a problem with a book like that is that the minute it's off the press, it's obsolete. Three restaurants have closed, a couple of bed and breakfasts have changed hands, one winery has changed its name and doesn't make wine any more. It's just the nature of any book of that sort. It has a very, very short life, no matter how good it is or how carefully researched it is.

And of course, one of the first things that happened was one of the people at Gallo went through it and said, "We're not in here." In the tasting room section, no, in the winery section actually. Well, the answer is that there was no Gallo tasting room when the book was written. What are you going to do, stop the presses and throw Gallo in there? You would have to do it for everybody. But that was the only one.

HICKE: We're about out of things to discuss, but there is a list of your awards that I'm going to put in. Are there any of them that you want to talk about?

HOWIE: No.

HICKE: There are no good stories about any?

HOWIE: Yes. I could talk about Advertising Woman of the Year. I was a member of the San Francisco Advertising Club, because you didn't have to be in advertising to belong. You could sell paint and you could belong. They gave two awards, Advertising Man of the Year and Advertising Woman of the Year. And two years in a row there was no Advertising Woman, in a group with a membership of 600 people. So there was another lady there. She wasn't in advertising and she and I said, "There's got to be somebody." We said to Muriel Tsretkoff, who ran the ad club, "How come?" And she said, "Well, they fill all the requirements except that they have no community service that we demand. That's one of our requirements." I've forgotten who the other lady was but she said, "Well, if nobody else gets it one of us will." So we volunteered for everything. [laughter] You name it, we did it. Then you had to find somebody who would pretend that you hadn't asked them to nominate you who would nominate you. [more laughter] So we both got nominated. No, I don't think that we both did get nominated, because she moved to Los Angeles, which made her ineligible. So I was nominated and I got it, which was always very funny, I thought. Which shows you can do anything if you really try.

Friend of Agriculture. Saralee Kunde is responsible for that one. Saralee and I worked together very closely because she was in the Premium Office when I was doing the PR, so we were in daily contact. I just think she is incomparable. There's nobody like Saralee. And I guess that she likes me too, because she was the one that nominated me for Friend of Agriculture.

HICKE: What's the Premium Office?

HOWIE: The Premium Office is an office at the fair, the Harvest Fair, where people pick up their books describing what they have to do with their pumpkins or jelly or whatever to enter.

Living Treasure was another one of those things. There was this money or this fund or something that the Luther Burbank Foundation had, and they were supposed to award it for Living Treasure in Art, Literature and something else; there were three. A friend of mine was doing volunteer work with the foundation, and they were moaning that this was so much work: how do we get people nominated, and how do we judge who they are going to be? She said, "Well, I really want you to get the literature." So I just got the Living Treasure in Literature, and that's the

thing I just gave you when you came in this morning. One of the requirements was that you had to pass on to the next generation your thoughts.

HICKE: We might just put this in to if that's OK?

HOWIE: Sure. Yes, this is pretty funny, because I didn't even know that my older daughter knew about this. About six months ago she phoned me and said, "Mom, do you have any copies of that thing you did for the award in literature? I want to show it to a friend of mine." When you rate with your kids, you rate.

Did I tell you about my kids?

HICKE: Tell me a little bit about what they are doing.

HOWIE: Linda is the older one, Linda Ramey. They're both bright and they both write beautifully and neither one will write. At one point or another I tried to get either one or both involved, and they just weren't about to care one way or another about PR. Linda got her librarianship, MLS degree, from Cal Berkeley.

HICKE: Master of Library Science?

HOWIE: Yes, and she worked at the San Francisco Public Library in several different departments doing different things. Then she went back and got a teaching credential, and she taught one semester at Pelton Junior High School. I don't know how far your memory goes with San Francisco but Pelton — if there were gangs they all went to Pelton. Linda is very firm, and one day one of the kids — just as a prank — stole her car keys. When she discovered they were missing, she stood up in front of the class and said, "You will return those keys, and not any of us will leave this room until you do." And he did.

Years ago, like 20 some odd, she and a friend started a soap and scent shop. They sell lotions and shampoos and soap. Any kind of soap you have ever heard of, if you want it, they'll find it and get it for you. Some things are made for them under their own label called Common Scents. It's on 24th Street between Noe and Sanchez. You know, 24th Street is one of those neighborhoods where there is a lot of activity. This year hasn't been as wonderful, but then the whole economy has been down. Now it's picking up again because the economy is picking up.

Linda was born in Brawley and grew up in Marin, went to Tamalpais, great graduating class. Everybody got some sort of a scholarship that year. It was just an outstanding class. Some kids got two and three scholarships. Linda got one in music and went to Salem [Oregon], to Willamette, on her scholarship. She phoned after the first year and said, "Mom, can I come home? It's going to mean giving up my scholarship, but can I come home?" I said, "How come?" "It's only not rained five days since I've been here." "Come on home."

Jann was born in San Francisco and raised in Marin. She goes off and does things. She was in the army for a while. She was going to be a veterinarian; she went to Davis, and chemistry wiped her out. So she switched and graduated with a double major, journalism and nutrition I guess, and she worked very happily at Macy's in the mattress department, in the warehouse, learned to use the forklift, all those things. Then she always wanted to work for the airlines, so she worked for United Airlines for a while. Then she went into the army, because she wanted to go to language school. She went to the language school [Army Language School, Presidio of Monterey, California] and learned Russian. Then did one full hitch and re-upped and injured her back, so she was released on a disability.

Then she went to the government, to the Department of Defense, back in Maryland, and she really liked that, but then she wanted to come back to California. So then she came back and worked at Livermore Lab, the Department of Energy.

When Linda was growing up, it was lean times. You know, sometimes we really were eeking our way along. By the time Jann was born I had a good paying job, and was doing a lot of interesting things, so I took her with me. If I had to do a home economics show in Dallas, I would take her. And she would work in the booth sometimes when she got a little older. I could almost see her coming along, but she shows no interest, no interest. So, too bad.

And people ask if I have any grandchildren. I don't have any grandchildren and never will. Neither girl has children.

HICKE: I think that about wraps it up, and I thank you very, very much. This has been very interesting.

HOWIE: I thank you.

SONOMA COUNTY WINE LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

P.O. BOX 15225, SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA, 95402

HIGHLIGHTS IN THE HISTORY OF THE WINE LIBRARY ASSOCIATION 1975 - 1988

Compiled by John Hutchinson, with thanks to Mildred Howie's store of memories and Katharine Stein's valuable technical assistance.

1975

Concept of a wine library developed by Mildred Howie and George Vare, then president of Geyser Peak Winery. Both had participated in the development of the Russian River Wine Road, which was always supportive of the wine library idea. Early supporters included Roger Bowlin, Mary Jo Chism, Crawford Cooley, Judy Gollan, Tim Hayes, Bob Mosher, John Sheela and Joe Vercelli, all of whom, in time, served as directors.

April 22, 1980

Memorandum of understanding: Russian River Wine Road and the Sonoma County Library "relative to the establishment of a wine library".

July, 1981

Gifts: Louis Gomberg donated a wine literature collection to what will become the Sonoma County Wine Library. Dr. Jan Boyazoglu contributed subscriptions to several European enology periodicals.

August 19, 1981

Benefit: First annual wine auction staged by the Kiwanis Club of Healdsburg at Italian Swiss Colony Winery at Asti. Roger Bowlin and Crawford Cooley served as managers, Forest Tancer as auctioneer, assisted by John Cochenette, Edgar Deas, Mark Decker, Chuck Reichel, Phil Rice, Lindsay Wurlitzer and Bob Young of the club.

August 30, 1981

Benefit: First of two vineyard runs (second in 1983) sponsored by Simi Winery. Gracie Blackmer was the principal organizer.

October 5, 1981

The Association was granted non-profit corporation status for charitable purposes by the State of California.

The Internal Revenue Service Tax exempt number is 501-C-3-94-2842757.

1982

Board meetings, with recorded minutes, were held on January 11, July 13, and October 6. Executive leadership was provided by Mildred Howie (founder and president through December 1985) and Roger Bowlin (Secretary to May 1983). Additional Board members, observers and volunteers included during 1982 to 1983: Mary Jo Chism, Crawford Cooley, Tim Hayes, Helen Hintereder, John Hutchinson, Linda Johnson, Katherine Jones, Bob Mosher, David Sabsay, Rachel Ann Seghesio, John Sheela and Joe Vercelli.

(Continued)

April 1982

Jennifer and Fenwick Riley were helpful in obtaining the support of the Friends of the Healdsburg Library committee to pursue construction of a new library building. The Rileys were active in assisting in the library site selection, as was Hope Scroggins. Mildred Howie and Joe Vercelli were prime movers as well, with journalistic assists from the Healdsburg Tribune's Guy Kovner and Rollie Atkinson.

August 11, 1982

Benefit: Second annual Kiwanis wine auction held at Sonoma Vineyards, Windsor.

June 5, 1983

Fund-raiser: First annual Polo, Wine and all that Jazz conceived and managed by Henry Trione, Tim Hayes, Mildred Howie, and Michele Hunter. Geyser Peak, Korbel and Pedroncelli wineries sponsored this event and those that followed.

August 6,7, 1983

Benefit: Third annual wine auction, Buena Vista Winery, Sonoma.

October, 1983

Designed by Rich Wallace, the wine Library logo was first used.

October 2, 1983

Benefit: Cable car bell-ringing contest.

1984

Regular Board of Directors meetings in alternate months.

January 16, 1984

Benefit: Proceeds from the sale of Hop Kiln posters presented to Mildred Howie by Dr. Marty Griffin.

January 26, 1984

Following six months of study, the revised by-laws were formally adopted and filed.

May, 1984

Gift: Geraldine Benoist donated her collection of Bob Balzar newsletters.

June, 1984

Mildred Howie published the first of six Association newsletters, continuing through October, 1986.

June 1984

Fund-Raiser: Second annual Polo, Wine and all that Jazz. The late Jim Haggin - and later Sandra Haggin - provided coordination with the Santa Rosa Polo Club.

July, 1984

Sonoma County Library and the Sonoma County Wine Library Association jointly purchased the Vintner's Collection of rare books.

July 1984

Jane Voss invited contributions of materials for the Association scrapbook. Volume one entries begin in 1981.

(Continued)

August 24, 1984

Benefit: Fourth and last of the Kiwanis sponsored wine auctions. Event held at Chateau Soverain, Geyserville.

November 8, 1984

First annual membership meeting at Mildred Howie's home.

December 21, 1984

News story in the Healdsburg Tribune reported that the Healdsburg Kiwanis Club regretfully withdrew its support from the annual wine auction; a Sonoma County Wine Library Association benefit.

1985

Formal organization of the Board of Directors under the by-laws, with monthly meetings held at the Central Library, Santa Rosa.

January, 1985

Membership campaign launched. The mailing included the first brochure and during the year attracted one hundred individual members, eight wineries, three sponsors and generated \$1,700 income. The committee consisted of John Hutchinson, Chair and Ted Stier, Judy Gollan and Mildred Howie with the latter providing administrative and computer services in her home, assisted by Ray Hewitt.

February 11, 1985

The Healdsburg City Council voted to purchase the site at the corner of Center and Piper streets in Healdsburg for the construction of the new library.

June 16, 1985

Fund-raiser: Third annual Polo, Wine and all that Jazz.

August 9, 1985

The state librarian awarded the City of Healdsburg \$625,000 to match its own \$626,000 and the \$630,000 from the County of Sonoma for capital construction of the new library building.

August 11, 1985

Benefit: Fifth annual Auction/Showcase held at the Jordan Winery. Assisting in previous auctions, the Sonoma County Wineries Association assumed full responsibility for this event and donated the profits to the Luther Burbank Center, Memorial Hospital and to the Sonoma County Wine Library Association. Executive Director Linda Johnson, assisted by Doug Albertson and Mary Chesak provided the management and promotional skills, coordinating the work of dozens of volunteers from the wineries and the Association.

November 12, 1985

Annual membership meeting held at Simi Winery, Healdsburg.

December 12, 1985

Ted Stier conducted his first Board meeting as president.

March 13, 1986

Donation to the Wine Library: In response to David Sabsay's appeal, the Board unanimously appropriated funds, not to exceed \$7,000, to catalog the rare books in the collection.

May 10, 1986

Benefit: First semi-annual Appellation Tour (Alexander Valley) sponsored by the Sonoma County Grape Growers Association and managed by the Arnolds: Fleurette, Leland and Randy.

May, 1986

Gift: Jordan Winery joined the Association as a benefactor (\$500).

June 8, 1986

Fund-raiser: Fourth annual Polo, Wine and all that Jazz.

July 7, 1986

Ground-breaking ceremony for the Healdsburg Regional Library, led by the Rev. Marvin Bowers and David Sabsay. Wine donated by Chateau Souverain.

August 7, 1986

Benefit: First Annual Golf Classic staged by the Winery Associates (Dave Ready and Beverly Turner).

August 7, 8,9,10, 1986

Benefit: Sixth Annual Wine Auction/Showcase sponsored by the Sonoma County Wineries Association. Auction and gala held at Sonoma Mission Inn.

September 11, 1986

Gift: Keith LeBaron contributed \$5,000 for a patio fountain at the new library. When that item fell within the construction budget, the monies were used to purchase tents for the annual Polo, Wine and all that Jazz event.

November 15, 1986

Annual meeting of the Association was held at the Sheraton Round Barn Inn, Santa Rosa. By-laws were amended. The feature of the meeting was the Premier Vintage Tasting for members, developed by Tim Hayes in cooperation with several dozen Sonoma County wineries.

November 21, 1986

Polo, Wine and all that Jazz logo registered (#28906) with the Secretary of State as a "Service mark".

December 7, 1986

Benefit: semi-annual Appellation Tour sponsored by the Sonoma County Grape Growers Association. The tour was held in the Sonoma Valley.

December 11, 1986

At the organization meeting of the Board, John Monday agreed to prepare a Board manual and to set up a budget for the year 1987.

1987

This was the year of the canvass, a concentrated effort to secure funding for the Wine Library within the wine industry. In March, Mildred Howie, John Monday and David Sabsay prepared a two-page policy statement clarifying

- (1) the purpose of the Wine Library
- (2) the need for financial support and
- (3) the purpose of the Wine Library Association.

(1987 continued)

In addition, David Sabsay developed a "prospectus", a first year operating budget and a "notice of intention to subscribe" which winery principals would sign to indicate their continuing financial support of the Wine Library. Marty Bannister, Randy Ulum and the Sonoma County Wine Technical Group surveyed eighty wineries with a mailed questionnaire, forty-seven of which were completed and returned. In May, John Hutchinson, John Monday and Ted Stier interviewed eighteen of the county winemakers, exploring their technical needs and their willingness to help fund the new Wine Library. Both mailings and follow-up interviews with winery principals by Board members and volunteers achieved a subscription list of forty-eight wineries and about \$10,000 in pledges by the end of the year.

April, 1987

Coordinated by John Hutchinson, regular quarterly newsletters were published and mailed to members and wineries.

Marianne Pedroncelli and Candace Maddux joined the Membership Committee, the latter providing computer services.

May 3, 1987

Benefit: The popular Grapegrower-sponsored Appellation Tour carried forty people through central Sonoma County. The Tour featured Westside Road of the Russian River Valley Area.

June 7, 1987

Fund-raiser: Fifth Annual Polo, Wine and all that Jazz.

June-July 1987

With Randy Arnold's resignation from the Board, he was replaced by Marty Bannister. Katharine Stein served out Randy's term as secretary.

August 13, 1987

Benefit: Second Annual Golf and Tennis Classic sponsored by the Winery Associates (Dave Ready).

August 13, 14, 15, 16, 1987

Benefit: Seventh annual Wine Auction/Showcase. Auction and gala held at Sonoma Mission Inn and other events throughout the county.

August 20, 1987

Wine Library Association donation to the the Wine Library: The board authorized the contribution of \$10,000 for trade books, technical publications and subscriptions effective January 1, 1988.

September, 1987

Mary Jo Garrett volunteered to keep up the scrapbook.

November 4, 1987

Fourth annual membership meeting held at Alderbrook Winery, Healdsburg.

January, 1988

The Association joined the Chambers of Commerce of Geyserville, Healdsburg, Santa Rosa and Sonoma Valley.

(Continued)

(January, 1988 continued)

Membership held close to 200 with eight sponsors and seventeen corporate members. Additionally, all of the wineries subscribing to the Wine Library are automatically members of the Wine Library Association.

January 14, 1988

Association donation to the Healdsburg Regional Library: Responding to the appeal from the Friends of the Healdsburg Library, the Association Board voted \$5,000 in matching funds for sculpture at the entrance of the new library.

April, 1988

A committee of six (Kerry Damskey, Margaret Davenport, Brian Gebhart, Diane Kenworthy and Rhonda Smith), headed by Marty Bannister, reached approximately 400 Sonoma County grape growers in an effort to enlist their support in funding the Wine Library. Businesses serving the wine industry were also canvassed.

April 14, 1988

Donation to the library: Discussion at the April Board meeting clarified the Association's contribution of \$30,000 for capital construction, assuring the inclusion of a Wine Library within the new Healdsburg library building.

May 1, 1988

Benefit: Sonoma County Grape Growers Association Tour of Dry Creek Valley.

June 5, 1988

Fund-raiser: Sixth annual Polo, Wine and all that Jazz.

July 14, 1988

Long-time leader Tim Hayes submitted his resignation as Director representing the Russian River Wine Road.

Donation to the library: Fred Furth, Chalk Hill Winery, donated \$1,500 to assure the purchase of a high-quality lectern for the Forum Room in the new library.

August 4, 1988

Mildred Howie accepted Chairmanship of an oral history project.

August 11 1988

Benefit: Third Annual Golf and Tennis Classic.

August 11,12, 13, 14, 1988

Benefit: Eighth annual Wine Showcase and Auction. Gala and auction at Sonoma Mission Inn, and winery-related events throughout the county.

September 2, 1988

Bo Simons was assigned to the Healdsburg Library with a special assignment to develop the Sonoma County Wine Library.

September, 1988

The Association Board approved and donated \$30,000 for the construction and installation of wood shelving for the new Wine Library.

October 13, 1988

It was reported that sixty-eight wineries, seventeen grapegrowers and six businesses had pledged almost \$17,000 to the Wine Library.

November 5, 1988

The Healdsburg Regional Library was dedicated in a public ceremony. Among the officials participating were:

Gary E. Strong, State Librarian;
Supervisor Nick Esposti;
Mayor W. R. Lucius, Healdsburg;
Randolph Newman, Chairman, Library Commission, Sonoma County;
Rev. Marvin Bowers, Chairman, Healdsburg Library Advisory Board;
David Sabsay, Director, Sonoma County Library.

November 6, 1988

Benefit: Sonoma County Grapegrowers Association sponsored Tour featured wineries and vineyards in the Alexander Valley which included the Murphy-Goode Winery followed by the Alexander Valley Vineyards and historic home tour and climaxed by a visit and tasting at the Gauer Estate.

November 17, 1988

First Board meeting held in the Forum Room of the new Healdsburg Regional Library, followed by the annual membership meeting. For his generosity, Keith Lebaron was voted an honorary corporate member, without term. For her many years of service and leadership in the Association, Mildred Howie was made Honorary Director, Founding President.

December, 1988

Gift: Noted wine writer, Margot Patterson Doss donated to the Wine Library, five file boxes of materials for the vertical files.

December 8, 1988

Library Director David Sabsay presented to the Association Board a list of Identified needs and costs (\$41,843) to effect accelerated development of the Wine Library. The Board also prepared for the dedication and celebration of the opening of the new Wine Library scheduled for February 26, 1989.

April 30, 1989

1996

TWENTY YEARS ALONG "THE ROAD"

Perhaps this isn't, technically, a harvest story, but in a manner of speaking it is the story of twenty years of harvesting - and the crop has been that elusive species, *turista vino*. Like the industry it supports, the Russian River Wine Road has expanded in all directions over its twenty years of existence. From 11 members, wineries only, on the first map, the Wine Road has grown to a membership of 63 wineries, 34 bed and breakfast inns, two tour companies, Wine Country Carriages and Tour De Vine, and a handful of affiliated "information" organizations, including its founding partner, the Healdsburg Chamber of Commerce, the Redwood Empire Association, Russian River Region, Sonoma County Wine Center, three appellation groups and the California Visitors Review.

In the early days map distribution was principally through winery and inn locations, chambers of commerce and local gas stations. Today a professional distributor places the map into racks at major hotels, airports and convention centers. Maps are shipped, often by the case, to travel agents, relocation centers, individuals planning reunions and conferences and people like Don Castle, United States Navy League, who recently appeared in person at a Wine Road meeting to thank the group, and point out that he needed several cases of maps, because Fleet Week was coming up and there would be 17 ships in San Francisco's harbor, sending 12,000 visitors ashore, many of them hoping to visit the wine country.

The newest map, due from the printer the first week of December, like its 20 predecessors, will be distributed absolutely free. The press run will be 500,000 maps!

The concept of the Wine Road was outlined by George Vare, then president of Geyser Peak Winery, as part of a promotional plan "to foster interest in, and appreciation of the North Coast wine region, its products and natural beauties." The idea became reality during a wrap-up meeting for the 1976 Russian River Wine Festival in the Healdsburg Piazza. The event had been particularly successful, and the late Ell Henry, one of the outstanding former directors of the Healdsburg Chamber of Commerce, commented that

the Fest could never have been possible without the participation of the wineries. Then he asked what concrete action could be taken to help the wineries the most. The unanimous answer, from the assembled committee was "sponsor our plan for a promotional group and map to lure tourists to our area."

By the start of summer, two months later, the Wine Road was official, with by-laws, officers and its first map, designed by Sherry Licu, hospitality manager at that time for Geyser Peak Winery. It was simple, but distinctive, printed in two colors, with grape clusters marking the location of each winery on an easy-to-follow map, on the front, with address and tasting information on the reverse. The first printing order was small - about one one-hundredth of the present quantity. By the end of what the wineries looked on as their "visitor season," i.e. the end of harvest, the supply was depleted.

Obviously the "Road" is not a single road, but a network of highways and country lanes following the general course of the Russian River. In theory, a traveler could join the "Road" at any of seven spots on the map, and travel to each of the member wineries without venturing onto a high speed highway. Most visitors pick one of the appellation areas, e.g. Dry Creek Valley or Alexander Valley, and visit clusters of wineries within those boundaries.

In 1977, the map design remained the same, four wineries joined the group, and a special section called, "When You Are Hungry or Tired," was added, with descriptive information about restaurants and inns. Originally, the eleven wineries were huddled together in a fairly compact area from Geyserville on the north to Windsor on the south. Charter members were Geyser Peak, J. Pedroncelli Winery, Nervo Vineyards, Trentadue Winery, Chateau Souverain, Simi Winery, Johnson's Alexander Valley Winery, Dry Creek Vineyard, Cambiaso Winery, Foppiano Winery and Sonoma Vineyards. All of the original wineries are still members, although some have changed hands and others, like Nervo - now Canyon Road; Cambiaso - now Domaine St. George, and Sonoma Vineyards - now a

cluster of three: Windsor Vineyards, Rodney Strong vineyards and Piper-Sonoma, have changed their names.

The new-comers the second year were Hop Kiln Winery, on the west, Landmark Vineyards (now re-located to Kenwood) to the south, Alexander Valley Vineyards, across Highway 128 from Johnson's, on the east, with Pastori Winery becoming the northernmost facility. Ralo Bandiera, inimitable host at Nervo Winery, created signs out of barrel ends, with arms pointing directions to each winery location. A surprising number of these still stand staunchly in their original positions along Chianti Road, Canyon Road and 128, although fancier signs, with many more arms, have replaced them at many busy intersections.

By 1981 the Road had grown to 27 wineries and a handful of bed and breakfast inns,. Qualifications for membership were then, and remain today, very simple. Wineries must be located along the flow path of the Russian River and permit visitors, even if only on a by-appointment basis. Dues have remained an incredibly low \$200.00 per year. While the membership was small, an additional requirement was that each winery must donate two cases of wine to a pool, which was then used when charity groups asked for a Wine Road tasting or donation. With the rapid increase in members, the logistics of collecting, storing and dispensing the wine became a nightmare, and the wine assessment was dropped, along with the group tastings.

Since the Wine Road is a completely volunteer organization, it has never had a paid director. Except for a live person to answer the RRWR 800 phone line, and for professional public relations assistance there has never been a "staff." Lorelee Stevens, Healdsburg Tribune staff member was at one time the Road's public relations expert.

Income from dues and the Russian River Wine Festival has always been used to fund map production. As the number of maps required to fill ever rising numbers of requests began to explode, the Road, through the imaginative and untiring efforts of present PR, Elizabeth Slater came up with an event to cure the winter doldrums, and bring some coin

of the realm into the coffers, as well. Called "Winter Wineland," this for-pay event is now heading for its fifth annual appearance. Like many relatively similar tour-around-to-the-wineries food and wine expositions, Winter Wineland is a two-day event. The \$15.00 per person charge (advance sales) covers both days, and provides the taster with a glass.

Dates for 1997 are January 18 and 19, and information is available by calling, toll-free, 800-723-6336. The first weekend in March, is celebrated by the two-day RRWR Barrel Tasting, now in its 18th year. ^{16th 1-17th 1st 15} This is a no-charge event, with the focus on wine futures. Dates for 1997 are March 1 and 2.

There are a good many ways in which the Russian River Wine Road organization is remarkable. Not only are the dues consistently low, the maps given away free, and no paid administrative staff in place, the RRWR dependably has 50 or more members in attendance at the membership meetings which are held the second Wednesday of every other month, at 8:30 in the morning. This is an exceptionally high participation level for a group of this sort. Meetings move briskly, possibly because most of those present have to open their winery tasting rooms at ten, but an amazing amount of business is transacted.

The current president is George Davis, owner/winemaker, Porter Creek Vineyards. A member since 1987, Davis is enthusiastic in his praise of the Road, its goals, and the job it does in attracting visitors. "It's just gotten better as the years go by. Our members are extremely creative in coming up with ways to increase the flow of visitors to the tasting rooms, and making those visits more fun." Asked about changes in the future, Davis remarks that the policy has always been "if it ain't broke, don't fix it, and it seems to work." There is a committee looking into designing a new public, fund-raising event, to replace the Russian River Wine Festival, and the expectation is that it will be as innovative as the whole idea of the Wine Road was 20 years ago.

Supplies of the RRWR map for 1996 are getting slim, but most of the wineries still have some on hand and it is hoped that the current batch will last until the 1997 version arrives. A map will also be mailed to anyone calling 800-723-6336.

Wine Words by Millie Howie



Barney, the wine dog

Did I tell you about Barney? Barney is the only three-legged, short-tailed St. Bernard in the county. Maybe in the world. How he got that way is another story. Several other stories. The reason we bring him up in a wine column (I knew you were wondering) is that he has become a zinfandel connoisseur.

He is a relative newcomer to consuming world of wine, though he has spent much of his life in the Russian River Valley and romping through the Foppiano Vineyards. In the early days, he showed an interest in grapes. Not avid, but enough to reach his head up and chomp one off a vine now and then. Once he lapped at a glass of cabernet left within reach on a coffee table, but he just sneezed and moved on.

Then he had his operation. The day he came home following the amputation, he was resting in the kitchen waiting for his dinner. His owner was reading the paper and sipping a glass of zinfandel. Without warning, this dog, which had never whined in his life, started emitting strange, sad, pleading noises. After a check of the incision and a quick touch of the nose — cold and damp — and a peek into the eyes — clear and bright — the owner-lady returned to her paper and picked up her glass. Immediately, the sad song resumed.

**In the early days,
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and chomp one off a
vine now and then.**

The inquiry, "Are you crying for a glass of zinfandel?" was followed by the setting of a saucer of wine in front of the big, pink eager tongue. The zin was lapped up quickly. Barney's veterinarian, Dr. Dave McCrystle (who grows cabernet in front of his pet hospital) said an ounce each evening would not hurt Barney and might even help. Shades of the French Paradox. So, that is the ritual. Barney will sniff and lap lackadaisically at any red wine, but it is zin that is greeted with slurps of joy.

WINE WORDS April 9, 1997

GOOD-BYE, OLD FRIEND

How sentimental can you get over a piece of machinery? Boy, can I answer that! Last week was a tough one, saying good-bye to a faithful companion of 24 years ... an old friend who had never let me down in 741,904 miles on the road.. We're talking here about an automobile, and while you may question what that has to do with wine, that trusty red Dodge Dart had more involvement with the North Coast wine scene than many of the people actually employed in the industry. To the wine community around Healdsburg, particularly in the Alexander Valley where the little car made its home for almost 20 years, it was as well-known as any vehicle on the road. And at wine events and tastings as far north as Seattle, and as far south as Ensenada, Mexico, it was recognized - principally for its cargo of wine.

In 1974, when the Jos. Schlitz Brewing Co. hired me to serve as its California public relations contact for Geyser Peak Winery, the little red Dodge - it never had a cutesy name - was shiny and sleek. It had lived in a comfortable Marin county garage, was washed and polished regularly and was ready to tackle the world. On moving north, it easily adapted to being a country car, and became acquainted with wine. Almost from day one we were filling its ample trunk and generous back seat with cases of chardonnay (then called pinot chardonnay!), cabernet and six or seven other varieties of wine. Seventeen cases fit easily, although it did call for a new set of heavier springs. Wherever anyone wanted a tasting, there we would go.

There was little room for hanky-panky on the part of its driver, since the entire wine community recognized the car and its plates, WINE WST. Jim and Phyllis Pedroncelli remarked once that, on the way to the Monterey Wine Festival, the red car passed them on the highway, and they never could catch up. Yes, it kicked up its wheels in glee when aimed at a highway. Once it was rebuked by a CHP officer who thought 72 mph was too

high a speed on Highway 280 - although how the little car must have puzzled as hundreds of cars zoomed past at the same or higher speeds as the officer wrote the ticket.

Nothing daunted my constant comrade. On a visit to the Sisquoc Ranch near Santa Maria one day, Bob Meyer, grape procurement manager for Geyser Peak said, "Go on. You can make it," when the car paused at the foot of a rise of soft vineyard dirt, about five feet high with a 30° grade. Make it we did, with power to spare.

As the miles mounted up, the little red Dodge's fan club grew. You have how many miles? 300,000. 400,000. 500,000. The only people who weren't thrilled were the people at Chrysler Motors. I bragged when it hit 350,000 and again at 500,000, and the response was always polite, but you could almost hear the PR people tearing their hair and muttering, "Don't let this get out. We can't let people know a car can go that many miles." And the miles mounted. The first 700,000 were on the original motor, and, yes, there are documents which can substantiate this.

A year ago January, the motor had to be replaced, but obviously that original motor was one of a kind. With fewer than 200,000 miles on it, the second motor began to knock and ping. Then, by moving out of Healdsburg - a no-smog-test area - and going 20 miles south, the handwriting on the wall became legible. Many visits to several mechanics and an investment of hundreds of dollars followed, to no avail. Finally, Walt Dieden pointed me towards Tim Fincher, miracle worker. "There's no way your car will pass the certification test," Tim Fincher told me as gently as he could, and if anyone knows cars, it's Tim.

If you like irony, try this. Yes, the car still ran, and the DMV quickly accepted my license renewal fee - with the proviso that a smog certificate must be supplied. Had the noble Dodge been built just four years earlier, it wouldn't have mattered whether it could pass the test or not. So, after several weeks of trying to come up with a solution, it was time to bite the bullet. A call to the Polly Klaas Foundation brought an envelope of paper work, and a nice gentleman who took my friend away. Did I stand in the driveway and

bawl? You damn bet I did! Twenty-four years is longer than many marriages last, longer than children stay around before leaving home, much longer than any of my dogs or cats have stuck around. So, please forgive this little eulogy. I miss my buddy.

SOME THOUGHTS FOR GUESTS TO CARRY HOME FROM "LIVING TREASURES" SEMINAR,
PROMOTION, RESEARCH AND LANGUAGE,"

PRESENTED BY MILDRED HOWIE, PR CONSULTANT AND WRITER,

ATURDAY, OCTOBER 2, 1993, HEALDSBURG REGIONAL LIBRARY

There isn't a day goes by in the life of anyone, of any age, with the possible exception of those who are comatose, which does not call for some involvement with the team of three which I have chosen for our conversation. And that is what this morning will be, I hope. I am not a speaker. Most writers are not, although, as with every other generality, there are many illustrious entertainers who both write and speak extremely well. I am not one of them.

I am here because the Luther Burbank Center for the Arts was kind enough to name me an award winner in the literature division of their annual "Living Treasures Awards." One of the provisions of the Award was that the honoree should conduct a seminar to pass along his/her knowledge, with the hope that those present might find some elements which they could apply to their own lives and careers.

Unless you are a born teacher, the thought of being mentor and educator can be intimidating. To make it easier for me, and easier for the listener/reader the thoughts here are loosely organized into three parts: a bit of philosophical chat, some biographical notes touching on how I got to where I am, and some nuts and bolts, PR information. Actually, the three pieces of this puzzle will overlap and run all over each other, but you may find something that applies to your life and career that will make having spent a Saturday morning at the library worthwhile. Thank you for coming.

Philosophically we touch first on the third of my triumvirate:

language. A shared love of the spoken and written word is probably what has drawn all of us together this morning. Loving language leads us into research. We hear a new word and wonder what it means, or where its roots lie. We turn to the dictionary. That's research, just as are our ramblings through the daily newspaper, the prowl through the yellow pages of the phone directory, the reading of the label on a can of tomato soup.

So, we take our love of language, extend it with research and promote what we have learned by telling our friends about the MSG in some soups, about the multitude of restaurants listed in the phone book, about the plight of the homeless as reported on page 10.

Some of us are gripped tighter by the mystery of words than others. I have been writing since I was five years old. The impulse to write, and the skill with words, are God-given. I have had no training. I have had extraordinary support along the way, and owe thanks to hundreds of people who said the right thing, or forbore saying the wrong thing at the appropriate time. While I may forget your name, or can't recall where I set my glasses down, I can still hear the voices of those people, and see the chalk-dusty schoolroom, the foggy city sidewalk, the steamy coffee shop, the kitchen table or office where the words were spoken.

I grew up in an extraordinary time, in San Francisco, when it was still an exciting city. Most of my classmates were first-born Americans, with parents who spoke strange languages, celebrated special holidays with music and costumes that were rich and varied, and were passionately determined that their children should speak only English, behave with dignity and decorum, and enjoy freedoms they had never known. As a fourth generation Californian, I was a minority, and fascinated by the richness of these other lives.

It was an easier time, even though it was the depth of the Depression. We children did not know we were poor. We had never been rich. Our dreams were, often, attainable: to get good grades, get a good job, and live good lives. Very simple and achievable goals.

When I was ten I wrote a murder mystery, "Jack and the Black Wizard." Every afternoon I walked to the streetcar stop with my fourth grade teacher, and read her the latest chapter. She listened and cheered for Jack, with a certain sadness for the wizard, who really was not a bad guy at all.

When I was twelve I started writing poetry. My junior high school English teacher read it and encouraged me. In high school I wrote for the school paper and school journal. The advisor for the journalism class became a friend I cherished for many years, well into my adult life.

Many of the good things which have happened to me over the years were lucky accidents, or accidentally perfect timing. One of the most valuable classes I ever took in high school was an elective called, Salesmanship. The teacher had probably never sold a thing in his life. The textbook, by current standards, would probably be considered simplistic. But the basic information it contained, and his delivery of that information I have used in every job I have ever held, yet not by the wildest stretch of imagination could I call myself a salesman. Yet, indirectly, that's exactly what PR is, selling.

Like most of the people of my generation, I worked at many different jobs, not selected to further my career, but just to be sure I could put food on the table, and clothes on my own back and the growing body of my small daughter. I think employment was an easier situation then. I

found my first job in San Francisco, by reading the want ads. I ignored the advice of the lady at the California Department of Employment (always wear a hat to an interview), and took the advice of my salesmanship book (be persistent. Sit on the prospective employer's doorstep).

Even writers need to hold on to a strong tether of realism, so, though I wanted to work for a radio station, I wrapped packages and rang up sales in a clothing store. And learned two important lessons: the first, that sometimes you have to be willing to take a small step back, to move ahead. The second: go right to the top when you want information.

My position behind the wrapping desk was secure, but not a rung on the advancement ladder. I wanted to be in the credit department, so, when I accidentally noticed an ad in the Sunday paper for a credit trainee, I made an appointment with the store manager and asked him why present employees hadn't been told of this job. His reply was that he didn't think I would be interested, since I was making \$25.00 a week, and the trainee post paid only \$20.00. I assured him the transfer was more important than the money, and I was moved into one of the most enjoyable jobs I have ever held.

Later in my career, when I hit a dead-end at ABC, I sought an audience with the station manager and told him I was thinking of quitting, because I had gone as far as I could go in my job. He surprised me by asking me what job within the station I thought I could do, and off the top of my head I said, "production." Although I didn't know it, there was a production position open. I, however, had no experience or training, but the program director spent my coffee breaks

with me, explaining the tools of the trade and the duties. Then, he took an even bigger chance, and appointed me, a woman, to a job no woman had held prior to that time, in a job that demanded membership in a union which, prior to that time, had never had a female member.

This again was the magical combination of timing and accident, but I am realist enough, and self-confident enough to add to those unpredictable elements, my own willingness to work hard, put in long hours, go the extra mile, and use all my creativity to improve everything about the job, for the benefit of my employers and my own pleasure and advancement.

Part of my progress in the field of public relations and promotion is due to the fact that I stayed in the same place. My career base was always San Francisco, and today, 22 years after becoming an independent, even though I have moved north, I still have a client, of long-standing in SF.

The three elements of longevity in one location, being at the right place at the right time, and accidentally becoming known as a specialist in two or three related fields have kept me working steadily and happily ever after. To skim quickly: because I had a long, good reputation in the broadcast field, I was invited by a small PR Agency to work as a freelance broadcast specialist on some outstanding health programs, and then invited to join the firm as a staffer.

As a pre-women's libber, I luckily went into PR full time when there were certain plum accounts considered to be "women's accounts." Thus I had the absolute joy of working on food, health, entertainment and restaurant accounts for six years, before suddenly deciding I needed security for my children's future and my old age. I cheerfully made my

next career move with the knowledge that the firm offered a great health plan, a pension program and good salary options.

My secure job lasted one and a half years. My department was eliminated in a cost-cutting move, and I was to be moved into Marketing. Like the house-cleaner who "doesn't do windows," I don't do marketing. I don't understand marketing, and I am sure that even if I did, I wouldn't like it. What a fortunate blind spot it turned out to be, because I left my job with two months of full salary, two months of half-salary, a cash-out of my pension and vacation, and took the company along as the first client for Howie Public Relations.

Because there were no freelance writers specializing in food at that time (accidental timing, again), I had plenty of work picking up overload assignments from large firms who needed extra help on their own accounts. With a reputation as a food-writer, I was one of three found by a head-hunter to interview for a PR job in the wine industry, which had no PR experts of its own. Through more accidental good fortune - I had been interviewed by a winery a year or two before, and had started a file of ideas for promoting wine - I was the lucky candidate, and had ten days to become a wine expert before hitting the road to beat the drums for a new winery, with a new label. What could be more exciting!

Since the wine industry was just being reborn at that time, everything that seems old-hat today was brand new: winery newsletters, wine-tastings, winemaker dinners, open houses, musical events, picnics, barbecues, even directional signs. There seemed to be a greater spirit of cooperation, which might be expected in a young, small industry. When the Russian River Wine Road was founded, in 1974, there were nine members. Today there are 56. The concept, oddly enough, has not changed.

To be a member, a winery had to be within reasonable distance of the Russian River, and be open to the public. Dues, and later, income from the annual Wine Fest in the Plaza, were used to print maps, which are given away free. The sole idea was to bring people to the wineries. A few events have been added: the Barrel Tasting and Winter Wineland, to name two, and various appellation areas have splintered off into similar organizations touting the glories of their own regions.

When the Wine Road was first conceived, not by me, but by George Vare, then president of Geyser Peak Winery, there was a simple outline of action. On the list of "maybe, someday" was a Wine Library. Accidents of time and place, again. Healdsburg was the last City in the county scheduled to have a new regional library. There had been a small force pushing for the project, and a more vocal, stronger force pushing against it. Those who dreamed of a wine library, and whose conviction was that it must be part of the library system, added their voices to the cry for selecting a site and going forward with the new library. When the Historical Society stepped in and said it wanted the old Carnegie Building for the Museum, things began falling into place. One of the first who needed to be convinced, and one of the staunchest backers of the wine library was then-County Library Director, David Sabsay.

It is wrong to call me the Mother of the Wine Library. What we had was a creation similar to a literary anthology, with a generous diversity of thought, energy and determination, contributed by dozens, or maybe hundreds of individuals.

But it did add to my roster of wonderful opportunities to be in on the beginning of something exciting. And, I am enough of a realist to admit that I have played the role of catalyst, and added energy, drive

and a feeling for people to all of the events in which I have been a participant.

IN CONCLUSION

Because of my success, as a basically untutored PR professional, and because of my observations over the years, my feeling that the best PR people are born, not educated into the field, has become strengthened. There are schools, seminars, work-shops, books, articles and heaven only knows what else that can teach the rudiments, but if the student does not have an innate ability to see, or make, opportunities, to build on others' ideas, to infuse some humor and fun into the promotion of a product or person, he/she may do an adequate job, may make a lot of money and earn a certain amount of respect, but everything will be by rote and will lack the imaginative fire that can light up a routine occasion or occurrence.

Also, if you have stayed with me to this point, you are aware that I put my trio of subjects in the wrong order. It all starts with language, speaking, reading, and most of all listening. Listening is a form of research. Sharing what you have learned is promotion of intellect. They are a great trio, in any order.

NUTS AND BOLTS

GENERALITIES

Do not confuse advertising with PR. You pay for advertising and can say what you like (within the bounds of good taste and decency) and the paper must print it, or the announcer must read it. If it isn't done the way you want, you often can have it done again.

With PR you are presenting the material, and the news media can accept it, cut it, mold it into a story they already have in mind, or

they can toss it into the waste basket. You have no real control. It is acceptable to ask if a piece of information was received, and if there is anything you can add, but, unless the news person has made a specific request for the material, you have no right to ask when it will appear, how much space you will get, or to complain about the way it is handled, unless it is grossly inaccurate.

It's okay to have a schedule for mailing releases, but it is not okay to stick to that schedule when you have nothing to say. Evaluate all the pluses and minuses of your client and his/her business. Look at everything as if you were seeing it for the first time. In many instances you will be.

Remember, everything is going to take time. Budget your time as well as your money. Do not set impossible deadlines, but once set, do everything within your power to meet them. One of the most discouraging things a PR person faces, and one of the first frustrations of the field, is that many times, when you have broken your back to get a job done and in on time, at someone's insistence and bludgeoning, the job will then sit on that person's desk for days, weeks, maybe months.

Try not to accept clients out of desperation. If you do not feel comfortable with the person or his/her firm, you are not going to do your best work, no matter how hard you try. Except in the most extreme cases, salary should not be the prime consideration.

TOOLS

BUSINESS CARDS

Business cards, for yourself or for a client, may not generally be thought of as a PR tool, but they are the cheapest and best tool you can have. Give some thought to their design. Have them printed in large

quantities (unless you think you are going to change the company name, or move). Hand them out to everyone who asks. Offer them freely to those you want to get to know your name. Check to see that you have a supply before you leave the office/home. Tuck some into your suitcase, briefcase. Do not rely on your wife to carry them in her purse, and conversely do not rely on your husband to carry them in his pockets, however, use these two locations as back-up.

PRESS KITS

Elements necessary to make the kit useful to the media: a history of the company; biographies of the principals; a detailed fact sheet about the company, its people and products, including dates and other necessary numbers; black and white photographs of principals, place of business, product line, etc. If appropriate, slides, not color photos, although new techniques can handle these, most papers do not have the new machines. Be sure all photographs have IDs firmly attached. Never release the originals or last copy of anything. For a number of practical reasons, I have a personal antipathy towards folders for press kits. I prefer to put the materials into a colorful envelope of good quality stock. Whatever you design, do not design something so expensive you cannot give it away freely in quantity.

BROCHURES

Simple is better than none. Collect samples of brochures that have caught your eye in racks, through the mail, or as hand-outs. Just because they may be tailored to some industry other than your own or your client's, it's the ideas you are after, not the wording, necessarily. Try to analyze what it is about them that attracted you, and adapt those features to your own needs.

MAILING LISTS

The best are the ones you compile yourself, although you may want to start with a bought or borrowed list. However, refine and fine tune it as quickly as possible. For customer lists, maintain a guest book where the public calls at your place, or client's place of business, or have a big fishbowl for people to drop their cards into, with a supply of small cards beside it for those who have no card or forgot them. For media lists, use resource books at your library, double-check the mast-heads of magazines and newspapers. If you do not use your list regularly, phone the last number you have listed for your most important contacts to be sure you have the right name, address, phone and FAX numbers. Keep up with modern technology as well as you can, but don't go overboard and turn your local editor's FAX machine into a junk mail recipient. Mail first class. Have your envelopes imprinted: "Forwarding and Address Correction Requested. When you hit the road, check the list for contacts where you will be traveling. If possible, call ahead to let them know you will be in town, and would like to stop by to see them.

PRESS RELEASES

This is one area that changes every day. My advice may seem antiquated to the modern school of PR practitioners. I use both the shot gun and rifle approaches, sending a general release to the largest possible audience, and either creating a more specialized release, or adding a personal note to specific writers/editors. I still like releases which are double-spaced, and on one side of the paper only. I realize this is not ecologically sound, but it leaves the editor room to add personal notes, should he/she call for details. Content is still more important than beauty, and just because your computer has 28 fonts,

doesn't mean you have to use them all on a two-page release.

OTHER TOOLS WHICH MIGHT BE CONSIDERED

Newsletters are good, but don't get locked into a production schedule.

Only prepare and mail a newsletter when you have something to say.

Postcards are becoming the tool of choice these days. Some are elegant pictorial beauties. Some are humorous, or seek to be. If your message fits, and you can express yourself in an appealing way in limited space, you save a lot of postage money.

Advertising specialties - Because I worked for many years in the entertainment industry I am a sap for goofy, unexpected things in mailings, or deliveries. People like surprises, and if they are both colorful and useful, they will be well-received, and carry your message into a lot of unexpected places. Take as an example, tee-shirts! Check your own office or household. Undoubtedly you will find pens, pencils, paper weights, magnets, pot-holders and shopping bags, just to name a few items, all embellished with someone's logo or name, getting free exposure every day.

THE PERSONAL TOUCH

The media is not the enemy, and if you have a built in antagonism towards the press, get into some other field. Make yourself valuable to the press, not just through your well thought out, well-written press releases. Become a source. Volunteer information. Develop contacts. Be active in the community. Volunteer to take part in panels, judgments, etc. Train yourself and your client to feel at ease meeting the public. If something unfortunate is happening to your client or his business, get to the press first with the bad news, and tell the story your way, with absolute truth.

Remember to say thank you.

WHEN NOTHING SEEMS TO WORK

Gather the gang together and conduct a Blue-sky session, with everyone tossing ideas into the pot, no holds barred. Then, from that pot pourri, pick and choose the best and brightest.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

There is no bibliography, because I read, and learn from everything. I was raised to respect the printed and spoken word. My Grandfather read to me constantly, till I was able to sound the words out myself - long before I reached school age. My Mother read everything, including the backs of cereal boxes and toothpaste tubes. As a child I learned that I might not get a lot of goodies or toys, but I could count on having lots of books, my own, the ones the rest of the family read, and those from the public library. My children are also hooked on books, and my older daughter earned her degree in librarianship at the University of California/Berkeley.

It is no accident that when I moved from Alexander Valley into town, I moved to a house right across the street from the library, and I admit, freely, that I openly campaigned for my appointment as Library Commissioner for the Fourth District.

INDEX – Mildred Howie

- Adams, Leon, 54-57, 59
 Arnold, Randy, 68
 Asher, Gerald, 77
 bag-in-the-box wines, 30
 Bagnani, Dante, 31-32, 37, 39, 75-76
 Balverne Vineyards, 49
 Bandiera, Ralo, 25-26, 49
 Bennett, Bob, 72
 Biever, Margit, 24-25
 Blum, Don, 14, 20
 Bowlin, Roger, 66, 69
 Brotherhood of the Knights of the Vine,
 38-39
 Brown Bag Opera, 39-40
 Bussone, Armand, 28
 C & D Ducks, 40, 43
 California Wine Experience, 57-58
 Cambiaso Winery, 59
 Carter, Blanche Roddick [mother], 1-2
 Carter, John Bernard [father], 1-2
 Catelli, Rich, 36, 64
 Cope, Frank, 8
 Davis, Clayla, 61
 De Luca, John, 28
 discrimination, 12-13
 Domaine St. George, 50
 Doss, Margot Patterson, 34-35
 Dwyer, Bill, 29
 Esposti, Nick, 73
 Farm Trails, 73
 Fisher, MFK, 61
 Foppiano Vineyards, 35, 44-45
 Four Monks Wine Vinegar, 31, 75
 Fredson, Bob, 50
 Friedman, Peter, 22
 Gauer, Ed, 46-48, 50
 Geyser Peak Winery, 21, 24-42
 Golden Gate Restaurant, 57
 Gollan, Judy, 66
 Gould, Paco, 24
 Grandcyk, Roy, 12
 Harvest Fair, 66
 Hayes, Jann Howie, 14-15, 86
 Heintz, William, 62
Healdsburg Tribune, 51, 60
 Henry, Ell, 63-64, 68
 Howie, Wallace, 13
 Huntsinger, Al, 28-29
 Hutchinson, John, 71-72
 Iwamasa, Harold, 19
 Johnson, Gail, 36
 Johnson, Tom, 63
 Jones, Andrew, 52
 Kelly, Paul, 73
 KGO TV broadcasting station, 11-12, 13
 King, Wally, 7
 KJBS [KCBS] broadcasting station, 8-9
 KLX broadcasting station, 8
 Kokusai Japanese Theater, 19-20
 Kongsgaard, John, 49
 Korbel Champagne Cellars, 45-46
 KTIM broadcasting station, 15
 Kunde, Saralee, 84
 L.C. Cole firm, 15-16
 Leinwand, Mark, 53
 Leinwand, Rita, 53
 Licu, Sherry, 64
 Likitprakong, Somchai, 50
 Lumm, Marjorie, 22-23
 Mackey, Elliott, 82
 Margot Patterson Doss Nature Walk,
 34-35
 Martin, Doug, 51
 Mettler, Jan, 34, 38
 Mildred Howie Public Relations firm, 18-21
 Moonlight Walk, 35-36
 Nakano Foods, 75
 Nalle, Doug, 49
 National Association of Broadcast Engineers and
 Technicians, 12
 Nervo Winery, 25-27
 Neuman, Claus, 27
 Odyssey, 70
 Paramount Pictures, 16
 Paulsen, Pat, 47
 Polo, Wine, and all that Jazz, 68
Price Line, 48
 Ramey, Dick, 5
 Ramey, Linda, 5, 10, 85-86
Redwood Rancher Magazine, 21, 52-54
 Republican conventions, 14-15
 Rubin, Hank, 62
 Russian River Wine Road, 63-64
 S & W Fine Foods, 16-17, 22
 Sabsay, David, 65, 67-68, 70
 San Francisco Advertising, Club, 84
 Saunders, Caryl, 18
 Scheiner, Paul, 11
 Scott, Morton, 20
 Sea Ranch, 44-45
 Shanken, Marvin, 53, 57-58
 Silverman, Hal, 82
 Simons, Bo, 62
 Smith, Glenn, 10
 Smith, Margaret, 75
 Society of Wine Educators, 41

Sonoma County Wine Library, 48, 61-74
Sonoma Wine Tour, 82-83
Sonoma Winegrowers, 69
Stare, David, 56
Stier, Ted, 71-72
Steppin ' Out, 60
Strong, Rodney, 22-23
Sunset Magazine, 75
Taylor, Sally, 21, 52-53
television, 11
Top Shelf, 48
van Kriedt, Phyllis, 55
Vare, George, 28, 31, 73
Varick, Jack, 24
Vercelli, Joe, 67
Vineyard and Winery Management, 48
Vintners' Club, 67-68
Wine Country This Week, 51, 60
wine judging, 80
Wine Library Associates, 70-72

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